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THE FILES



JOHN CARPENTER'S
"VAMPIRES"

ANIMATING "ANTZ"

"URBAN LEGEND"

"PRACTICAL MAGIC"

PLUS: FILMING CHRIS CARTER'S "MILLENNIUM"

Volume 30 Number 7/8



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CINEFANTASTIQUE

THE WORLD OF STAR TREK

THE REVIEW OF HORROR FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION, YOUR GENRE NEWS MONTHLY

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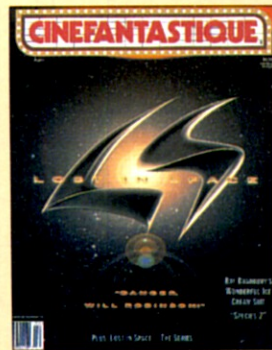


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"The Magazine with a Sense of Wonder"

OCTOBER 1998

Welcome back to our second annual "Halloween Horrors" double issue, wherein we delve deeply into the darker side of *cinefantastique*. Not coincidentally, X-FILES is on our cover—a show that not only kept televised terror alive but also made it respectable, at a time when its cinematic counterpart seemed to be vanishing from theatre screens.

Well, a lot's changed since then. Last year, we asked the question, "Is Horror Back From the Dead?" This year, the answer seems to be a resounding yes, as studios rush to cash in on the current craze started with SCREAM. Unfortunately, this has turned out to be something of a mixed blessing, resulting in a proliferation of tongue-in-cheek teen terror flicks that rehash the slasher cliches of the '70s. Meanwhile, THE X-FILES, once the standard bearer, has slipped into unimaginative repetition: "How many times have we been here before?" asks Mulder at the end of the film version when he realizes he's back where he started, empty-handed again, and the audience can only shout, "Too many!" (Of course, there's a flying saucer-shaped hole in the Arctic ice—which should offer some kind of corroboration for Mulder's beliefs—but both the character and the filmmakers conveniently ignore this.) It's as if Chris Carter is afraid that any kind of progress toward resolving the conspiracy story will terminate the show, and so he is dedicated to stretching it out as long as possible.

Oh well, there is still reason for hope on Horror's horizon: X-FILES' darker twin, MILLENNIUM, is developing on its own, VAMPIRES is John Carpenter's best film in years. And if that isn't enough to keep horror fans happy, we have articles on lost Dracula films; on American International Pictures, creators of great cult horror flicks from the '60s; on Hammer horror composer James Bernard; and on the debate over rescoring silent horror films for modern audiences.

Happy Halloween!

Steve Biodrowski



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INSECT ANTICS

A BUG'S LIFE (Disney)

Pixar Animation's follow-up to TOY STORY is an animated adventure loosely derived from Aesop's fable of the Grasshopper and the Ant, with a bit of Kurasawa's THE SEVEN SAMURAI thrown in for good measure: A colony of ants finds themselves under attack by marauding grasshoppers; to fight off the attacking hordes, an ant named Flick journeys from his anthill to enlist the aid of professional soldiers but instead ends up hiring an out-of-work flea circus. But the on-screen battle is not the only thing going on; almost as interesting is the behind-the-scenes bug war: BUGS, the original title of A BUG'S LIFE, was abandoned to avoid the similarity to DreamWorks' ANTZ, and more recently DreamWorks pushed up the release of their film to beat Pixar into theatres.

November 20



RELEASE SCHEDULE

Upcoming cinefantastique at a glance, along with a word or two for the discriminating viewer.

compiled by Jay Stevenson
(unless otherwise noted)

ANTZ (DreamWorks) October 9

DreamWorks managed to push up the release of its debut computer-generated insect epic, originally scheduled for the Christmas season. Now they will be opening a month ahead of their rival, Pixar's A BUG'S LIFE. Woody Allen, Sharon Stone, and Gene Hackman voice the animated cast. SEE PAGE 8.

APT PUPIL (TriStar) October 16

This was originally slated for April, until a lawsuit shrouded the film in a cloud of controversy. The families of several underage extras sued over a nude shower sequence. Although technically it is not illegal to film minors nude in a non-sexual context, the sequence was re-shot anyway to avoid even the possibility of an injunction. REVIEWED ON PAGE 117.

THE BRIDE OF CHUCKY (Universal) October 16

The CHILD'S PLAY franchise is back, whether you want it or not. At least, the directorial stylings of Hong Kong veteran Ronnie Yu (WARRIORS OF VIRTUE) promise to bring some visual life to the killer doll saga. Jennifer Tilly joins the cast as the title character; Brad Dourif is back as the voice of Chucky.

CANNIBAL: THE MUSICAL & KILLER CONDOM (Troma) October (limited)

Those fun-loving traumatic folks at Troma unleash a drastic double bill with titles that speak for themselves. The first is a take-off on FRIDAY THE 13TH-type gore films, crossbred with Hollywood musicals; its release is no doubt the result of the industry heat surrounding key creative personnel Trey Parker and Matt Stone, who not only have a hit on TV with SOUTH PARK but are also starring in their first major studio film, BASEKETBALL. KILLER CONDOM is a German film (set in New York!) about a gay detective tracking down a murderous birth-control device, which has the city in a grip of profligate panic.

CUBE (Trimark) Winter 1999?

At this point, there's just no telling when this film is coming out. Despite a modest promotional push for a September/October bow (including long-lead time interviews with the director, who flew in to Los Angeles from Canada), Trimark seems intent on pushing the film back to next year. Said director Vincenzo Natali of the reception his film has received so far, "It's done surprisingly well on the festival circuit, even though festivals generally tend to look down their noses at genre material." With this positive buzz, one wonders why Trimark is so hesitant about releasing the film, but Natali admitted, "It's an odd film. It doesn't fit well into the world of art films or commercial films. However, I feel that in the long term it will develop a healthy life." REVIEWED IN CFQ 30:2.

FANTASTIC PLANET October (limited)

The Laemmle Theatres will be screening a new 35mm print of this animated science-fiction film from Roland Topor and Rene Laloux, which won the Grand Prix at Cannes in 1973. Barry Bostwick and Marvin Miller are among the dubbing voices.

GODS AND MONSTERS (Lions Gate) October 23/November 6

Lions Gate was debating whether to skip October 23, because Ian McKellen (who plays FRANKENSTEIN-director James Whale) is also in APT PUPIL, which was scheduled for the 23rd as well. Since PUPIL has moved up a week, the 23rd is now clear. SEE CFQ 29:6-7.

PRACTICAL MAGIC (WB) October 23

Sandra Bullock, Nicole Kidman, Stockard Channing, and Diane Weist star in this film of the novel by Alice Hoffman. SEE PAGE 14.

SIX STRING SAMURAI (Palm) September 11

A live-action anime-style post-apocalyptic adventure from first-time director Lance Mungia. SEE PAGE 52.

SOLDIER (WB) October 16

Kurt Russell stars as a former soldier who, in order to defend a helpless outpost on a distant planet, must make a final stand against the cyborg warrior that rendered him obsolete. Paul Anderson directed, from a script by Dave Webb Peoples.

URBAN LEGEND (TriStar) September 25

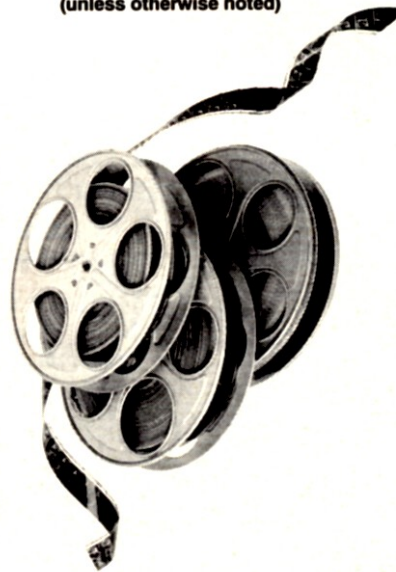
In yet another SCREAM-fest, a psycho-killer (this time inspired by urban legends) is killing hapless teens on a college campus. SEE PAGE 10.

VAMPIRES (Columbia) October 30

John Carpenter leaps back to life with this fusion of gothic and western motifs—rather like FROM DUSK TILL DAWN, except good. SEE PAGE 54.

WHAT DREAMS MAY COME (Polygram) October 2

Director Vincent Ward (THE NAVIGATOR) has filmed Richard Matheson's novel of love-after-death with a visual style that is amazing to behold, capturing a magical sense of wonder that makes the afterlife seem more than real. Ron Bass's screenplay retains the essentials of the book while adding plot twists and emotional layers that bring the story to vivid life on screen. Robin Williams stars as Chris, a child doctor who risks his very soul to rescue his beloved from Hell. Cuba Gooding, Jr., Annabelle Sciorra, and Max Von Sydow star in this truly visionary masterpiece. Highly recommended.



NO BACON, PLEASE!

BABE: PIG IN THE CITY (Universal)

The little pig who went a long way goes even farther in this sequel—all the way to the big city. (In fact, this was initially titled BABE IN METROPOLIS, but Warner Bros. probably didn't want to do a crossover with their still dormant SUPERMAN franchise.) This time, producer and co-writer George Miller (MAD MAX) takes over the directorial reins from protege Chris Noonan, who helmed the original. James Cromwell (pictured at left) returns to his Oscar-nominated role as Farmer Hoggit, joined this time by Mickey Rooney.

November 27



HOLLYWOOD GOTHIC

ANGEL, BACK FROM HELL

Joss Whedon on spinning off Buffy's boyfriend into his own TV series.

by Mitch Persons

The second season of TV's **BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER** ended with a double question mark. In the final episode, "Becoming, Part II", Buffy had successfully, albeit reluctantly, dispatched her ex-boyfriend Angel the Vampire and then sent him directly to Hell. Minutes later, Buffy—suffering guilt pangs, expelled from school, her home, and her town of Sunnydale—boarded a bus headed for parts unknown. Now, is Angel really dead? Is Buffy ever going to be coming back to Sunnydale?

Fear not, **BUFFY** fans. Both Buffy (Sarah Michelle Gellar) and her Angel (David Boreanaz) will be returning to bedeviled Sunnydale for a third season, according to creator, executive producer, and head writer Joss Whedon: "Buffy and Angel will definitely be around for the next season of **BUFFY**," admitted "but this year, after Buffy graduates from Sunnydale High, Angel will be moving on to another town—and to his own series."

David Greenwalt, the co-executive producer of **BUFFY**, will produce the new show, titled **ANGEL**. David Boreanaz reprises his role as everybody's favorite good-bad vampire. Like **BUFFY**, **ANGEL** will be on the Warner Bros. network, which plans to air the premiere episode a year from this Fall.

"**ANGEL** is a series that is simi-



Good-guy-vampire-gone-bad Angel (David Boreanaz) was dispatched by **BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER** (Sarah Michelle Gellar), but he'll be back in his own show.

lar in tone to **BUFFY**, but with a few embellishments," Whedon added. "The show is a little bit more adult, a little darker in tone; but much as in **BUFFY**, Angel's personal demons literally become real demons—ones that he finds he must eliminate."

Fans should be pleased to know that Angel is going to be his first-season good guy vampire instead of the monstrous bloodsucker that he became in the second season. He will not simply be a good guy, however. "He'll be a little

more complicated than that," said Whedon. "His life will be grim, but watching **ANGEL** will not be like following the misadventures of some evil troll, nor will viewers be seeing a sickeningly loveable goody-two-shoes. In this series, Angel is a tortured individual, a creature who is constantly dealing with everything that has happened in the last three seasons of **BUFFY**: all the love, all the adventure, and all the evil."

Whedon contends that **ANGEL** will not have to depend on **BUFFY** for viewers to know what's going on. "**ANGEL** is a show that stands very much on its own, a completely autonomous unit. If you do happen to be a **BUFFY** buff, however, your watching of **ANGEL** will be made all the richer," he said. "Not that we have completely abandoned **BUFFY** in favor of **ANGEL**. There will be crossovers. Since Sarah and David get along so well, we are trying to schedule things so that Sarah makes an occasional appearance in the new show. Actually, anybody in **BUFFY**, Buffy's mentor Giles, or her friends Willow, Xander, Cordelia, or Oz, may be possible crossovers. And Angel will probably show up in Sunnydale every now and then." □

Long Dark Knight

by Douglas Eby

What happened to **BATMAN 5**? Following the tradition of the series, rumors were rampant before the release of **BATMAN AND ROBIN**, concerning which villains would appear in the next film and who would play them. Then when the film came out and barely managed to clear \$100-million despite a huge budget and a tremendous promotional push, the buzz suddenly died down. Although a box office disappointment, **BATMAN AND ROBIN** (written by Akiva Goldsman) is a film that director Joel Schumacher is "still very proud of" according to an interview in the *Los Angeles Times*. He was also quoted, "Parents had asked me to make a **BATMAN** that little kids could enjoy, that wasn't as dark as the others, and I felt like we did. You can't win. I did talk to Lorenzo [DiBonaventura, Warner's production chief] about possibly doing another one. I would only do it on a much smaller scale, with fewer villains and truer in nature to the comic book." Schumacher will have a break from the Dark Knight to film **8MM**, scripted by Andrew Kevin Walker.

Mark Protosevich (who went on to script **IMPOSTOR**, part of Dimension's three-part **ALIEN LOVE TRIANGLE** anthology examining relationships between humans and aliens) had been hired to write the fifth **BATMAN**. Protosevich said the project "was really kind of a let-down. I was hired to write a script for what would have been **BATMAN 5** before **BATMAN AND ROBIN** came out, and when it came out and was perceived to be a critical and financial disappointment, [the studio] decided that they wanted to wait before doing another one. Bob Daly said there won't be another **BATMAN** movie for at least three years. And so, the draft that I wrote will most likely just sit and collect dust on the Warner Brothers' shelf. Which was really frustrating, because it was sort of one of those 'Dream come true' jobs." □

Short Notes

HIGHLANDER-scribe **Gregory Widen** will direct the third sequel, **HIGHLANDER: THE SEARCH FOR CONNOR**. **Adrian Paul**, of the TV series, will star, along with **Christopher Lambert**, who top-lined the first three pics. □ **Oscar**-winner **Geoffrey Rush** (**SHINE**) will play the evil genius Cassanova Frankenstein in the comic book adaptation **MYSTERY MEN**. □ Throwing down the gauntlet, Universal Pictures announced it will have **JURASSIC PARK 3** on screens in the summer of the year 2000, which is when TriStar originally intended to have its (now doubtful) **Godzilla** sequel ready. Exec producer **Steven Spielberg** will not direct but will work with novelist **Michael Crichton** on developing a script. □ **Darren Aronofsky**, who made a spectacular debut with the low-budget **π** ("Pi"), has inked a deal with Dimension to direct his next science-fiction feature, **PROTEUS**, about a U.S. submarine dodging depth charges from above while being attacked by monsters from below. □ Lions Gate's deal to star **Leonardo DiCaprio** in **AMERICAN PSYCHO**, reported last issue, has apparently fallen apart. □

HEADLESS HORSEMAN

Tim Burton will helm Andrew Kevin Walker's adaptation of "Sleepy Hollow."

by Anthony P. Montesano

While waiting for SUPERMAN to eventually fly, director Tim Burton has signed on to direct SLEEPY HOLLOW, a feature adaptation of Washington Irving's short story "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," adapted by SEVEN screenwriter Andrew Kevin Walker. Johnny Depp (of Burton's EDWARD SCISSORHANDS) is being courted to play Icabod Crane, and Christina Ricci (who previously worked for producer Scott Rudin in the ADDAMS FAMILY films) is front runner for the female lead. Shooting is scheduled to begin in October in Tarrytown, NY, the basis for the fictional town of Sleepy Hollow.

Said Walker of his approach to the script that attracted Burton to the production, "It's a period piece, but also a really bizarre detective story. In the original 'Legend of Sleepy Hollow' by Washington Irving, the Headless Horseman isn't real; he's a prank played on Icabod Crane to get him out of town, because of jealousy over a woman. In this SLEEPY HOLLOW, the horseman is real: it's not a 'Scooby Doo' thing; it's the real deal. A lot of people think of 'Sleepy Hollow' as sort of a children's thing, because of the Disney adaptation, which is a great animated adaptation of the short story. But this one, and the short story itself, I don't think are really for kids. It's a story I developed with Kevin Yeager—who created the



Tim Burton and Johnny Depp (seen above with Vincent Price in EDWARD SCISSORHANDS) will reteam for SLEEPY HOLLOW, with Depp as Icabod Crane.

Crypt Keeper and Chucky. This story is particularly for the adult audience—but I should add that kids will love it, too."

Although Walker came to fame because of his contemporary horror-thriller SEVEN, he had no problem dealing with period horror subject matter. "It was important to do a lot of research, just because you're dealing with a different period," he explained. "In fact, Kevin Yeager and I went to Tarrytown, and we toured with Burns Patterson of the Historic Hudson Valley organization. He took us all around and showed us the buildings being restored. We even saw the church

that is supposedly the one Washington Irving referred to in 'Sleepy Hollow.' It's nice to walk through a building that's close to the period you want. It might not help in a specific way, but it does help a little with mood."

Walker added that his moody script is "jam packed with the Headless Horseman and witches and all kinds of superstition. The Hessian Horseman that became the Headless Horseman was a German mercenary soldier who came over during the Revolutionary War. And he was just the best at killing. I don't go into a lot of detail trying to explain why he particularly enjoyed murdering people on the battlefield. But when he returns, it's because somebody has his head, and that makes him very angry."

Though Burton might seem an odd choice to helm a dark-hued horror movie, the character of Icabod Crane is another in a long line of eccentric outsiders who have peopled his films. Also, Burton's whimsical fantasies have often masked disturbing themes, which came to light in his recent book *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy and Other Stories*—a series of twisted tales and illustrations detailing infanticide, cannibalism, and other forms of misery inflicted on deformed and hapless characters. If anything, an all-out horror film is the next logical step for him. □

Obituary

by Jay Stevenson

Jerome (Jay Lewis) Bixby

The 75-year-old science-fiction writer passed away in April, of complications from quadruple bypass surgery. He wrote the low-budget gem IT, THE TERROR FROM BEYOND SPACE! (The basic premise for the film was later incorporated by Dan O'Bannon into his script for the blockbuster ALIEN.) Other credits include episodes of the classic STAR TREK television series, plus the features FANTASTIC VOYAGE, THE LOST MISSILE, and CURSE OF THE FACELESS MAN.

Henry G. Saperstein

Godzilla's point man in the U.S. died in June from cancer; he was 80. The producer imported many of Toho's science-fiction films to the states and also arranged co-productions that cast American stars in films like MONSTER ZERO (Nick Adams) and WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS (Russ Tamblyn). He was also instrumental in initiating the deal that resulted in the Americanized TriStar film. His last credit as producer was the live-action MR. MAGOO, with Leslie Nielsen. □

Bond Wars

THUNDERBALL and NEVER SAY NEVER AGAIN producer Kevin McClory continues in his claim that he owns not only remake rights to that particular James Bond property but also rights to make a series of Bond films apart from the MGM-UA series that continues to this day, most recently with TOMORROW NEVER DIES.

McClory set up his would-be franchise at Sony, which is currently involved in an on-going legal battle with MGM. In one of the more preposterous legal ma-

neuvers, Sony's lawyers have claimed that McClory actually co-created the Bond character as he came to be known in film (as opposed to the literary version) when he collaborated with Ian Fleming on a series of unproduced TV scripts; therefore, Sony is seeking royalty payments on all the old Bond films.

It's doubtful whether Sony's claim will prevail, but it has managed to hurt MGM's stock market share, since it casts doubt on the ailing studio's one guaranteed cash cow. □

Production Starts



ELMO IN GROUCHLAND

The Muppet cast of SESAME STREET make the transition to the big screen, supported by Vanessa Williams and Mandy Patinkin.

THE NINTH GATE

Roman Polanski's comeback film stars Johnny Depp, Lena Olin, and Frank Langella. It's about a rare-book dealer (Langella) who hires an investigator (Depp) to find a Satanic volume needed to complete his collection.

PSYCHO

This film had barely started shooting before teaser trailers were up on screens announcing its eventual arrival—to lackluster audience response. I mean, who cares, when we've already seen it done right?

I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER

More teen terror in the sequel to last year's hit.

I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER is Columbia Pictures and Mandalay Entertainment's sequel to the hit, I KNOW WHAT YOU DID

LAST SUMMER. Back for a second appearance are Jennifer Love Hewitt as Julie James, and Freddie Prinze Jr. as Julie's sometime boyfriend, Ray Bronson. Also back for the sequel are producers Neal H. Moritz, Erik Feig, Stokely Chaffin, and Bill Beasley. The script is by Trey Callaway. The director is Danny Cannon (JUDGE DREDD.) New to the cast are Jennifer Esposito (SPIN CITY) as Nancy, and in her film debut, Brandy.

I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER begins when Julie's best friend Karla Wilson (Brandy) invites Julie to join her on an idyllic, all-expense-paid vacation for four to the Bahamas. Still overcome with guilt and anxiety over the death of fisherman Ben Willis (Muse Watson,) Julie decides to go along with Karla for some much-needed recuperation. Accompanying the girls are Julie's old flame Will Benson (Matthew Settle,) and Karla's current boyfriend, Tyrell Martin (Mekhi Phifer.) What Julie and her three chums encounter, however, is far from idyllic. "Julie goes along to this island so she can get away from all these real, or imagined, terrors," said director Cannon. "They check into this isolated hotel, and at first, there is no threat. Then all hell breaks loose. There is this hooded creature that is after everybody, and then a gigantic hurricane hits the island."

The characters find themselves stalked by a chortling, slicker-clad maniac. Is it Ben Willis? Is he alive and well and seeking revenge on Julie and her companions? Or is Ben a ghost? Perhaps the sinister, murderous figure is someone (or something) else entirely.

"That's where this script differs from the first one," said Stokely Chaffin, a petite stunner who has more of the look of an actress than

PREVIEW BY MITCH PERSONS

the producer she is. "In I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER, we had a very real, corporeal monster-killer type chasing down Julie and her buddies. In I STILL

KNOW...we are dealing with something that's more surreal; we are never quite sure just what is going on."

Although the first film had a ready-made source, the sequel required an original story. "It took a lot of sweat and tears to develop the plot line. For I KNOW WHAT YOU DID... we had a very strong story right from the outset. The film was based on the Lois Duncan suspense novel, and we had Kevin Williamson scripting the screen version. Unfortunately, when it came time to develop a screenplay for I STILL KNOW... Kevin was involved in another project. We talked to no less than 50 writers to hear their story ideas and their takes on I STILL KNOW... Nobody really clicked until we spoke to Trey [Callaway.] He came up with just as strong a storyline as Kevin did."

Jim Gillespie, who helmed I KNOW WHAT YOU DID... was approached for the follow-up. "We hoped that he would want to add the same skill that he used in that film to this new one," said Chaffin. "Jim is an incredibly gifted director, but I think that he wanted to go on and do a

JUDGE DREDD's Danny Cannon (below) took over the directing reins for I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER, after Jim Gillespie passed.



Having survived I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER, actress Jennifer Love Hewitt returns in the sequel, still pursued by the ghosts of her past.

different sort of movie. It's very rare that a director will do both the first film and the sequel, especially when he hasn't written it, and invented the characters, as Jim did not. Danny Cannon is a great dramatic director. I think that's the reason why we went with him, because he really knows how to get to these tense, dramatic scenes. He's like a theatrical director in some ways—delving into the souls of his characters, finding the conflicts that exist there."

"This is terrific; this is good," effused Cannon. "I was considered as director for I KNOW WHAT YOU DID..., but I decided to pass. It was a reluctant decision on my part, because I always wanted to do something that was not only scary, but *scary* scary. I STILL KNOW... is just that kind of film—in double doses. It also adds more of a dramatic element than the first movie, because right from frame one, we're with Julie, feeling her deep fear and her guilt. Then, suddenly, we start to doubt her, because there is so much going on in her head; so much trauma has happened, and so much imagination is now involved. So maybe

a lot of this is conjured up in Julie's mind. Maybe a lot of this is somebody manipulating the situation just out of cruelty, or maybe it literally is happening.

"Sophisticated movie watchers or older audiences will feel the echoes and resonances of films like TEN LITTLE INDIANS or THE HAUNTING. In fact, there are references to those types of suspense/haunted house films right at the beginning of the picture. But I STILL KNOW... is not just geared for mature audiences. There are enough elements to keep younger fans entertained. Actually, we hope to scare the tar out of them!" □

ANTZ

The Bug Wars heat up as DreamWorks pushes its CGI opus out before BUG'S LIFE.

By Mike Lyons

Get ready for round one of "The Big Bug Off." Earlier this year, DreamWorks surprisingly announced that ANTZ, its animated co-venture with the computer animation house, Pacific Data Images, originally slated to be released March of next year, was bumped up to October 2. Whether or not by coincidence, ANTZ now beats out A BUGS' LIFE, another computer-animated insect epic from Disney and Pixar, by more than a month.

"For us, it hasn't been particularly emotional, it's been more a case of, 'Oh my God how are we going to do this?!,'" said ANTZ producer Aron Warner of moving up five months on the calendar. "But, we adjusted and we shifted and everyone basically stepped up to the plate, unbelievably so.

Part of it was a response to the fact that we were doing so well. It wasn't a decision that came down the line, saying, 'You guys have to hurry up, and finish earlier.' Steven Spielberg and Jeffrey Katzenberg saw the film at a certain point and said, 'You guys are doing great. What do you think about doing this?' We analyzed it and realized that we could."

ANTZ does indeed focus on the life of an insect, more specifically, an ant named Z-1948 ("Z" for short), who lives in a cold, conformist society, in which he and other drones are forced to work away each day for their "beloved" queen. The seeds of revolution, however, are in the wind and "Z" is about to find himself its reluctant leader.

"He truly is an anti-hero," said producer Warner of the film's main player. "He's somebody who is unhappy with the way



Woody Allen voices ant Z-1948 (left) in ANTZ.

that the world is and isn't really sure why. The world seems pretty mundane, without the individual choice to move in any other direction. He gets the idea that maybe there is something better and that maybe he can change things. I think his attitude reflects the way most people feel about the world in general. He finds that he can go out and do what his heart tells him to do."

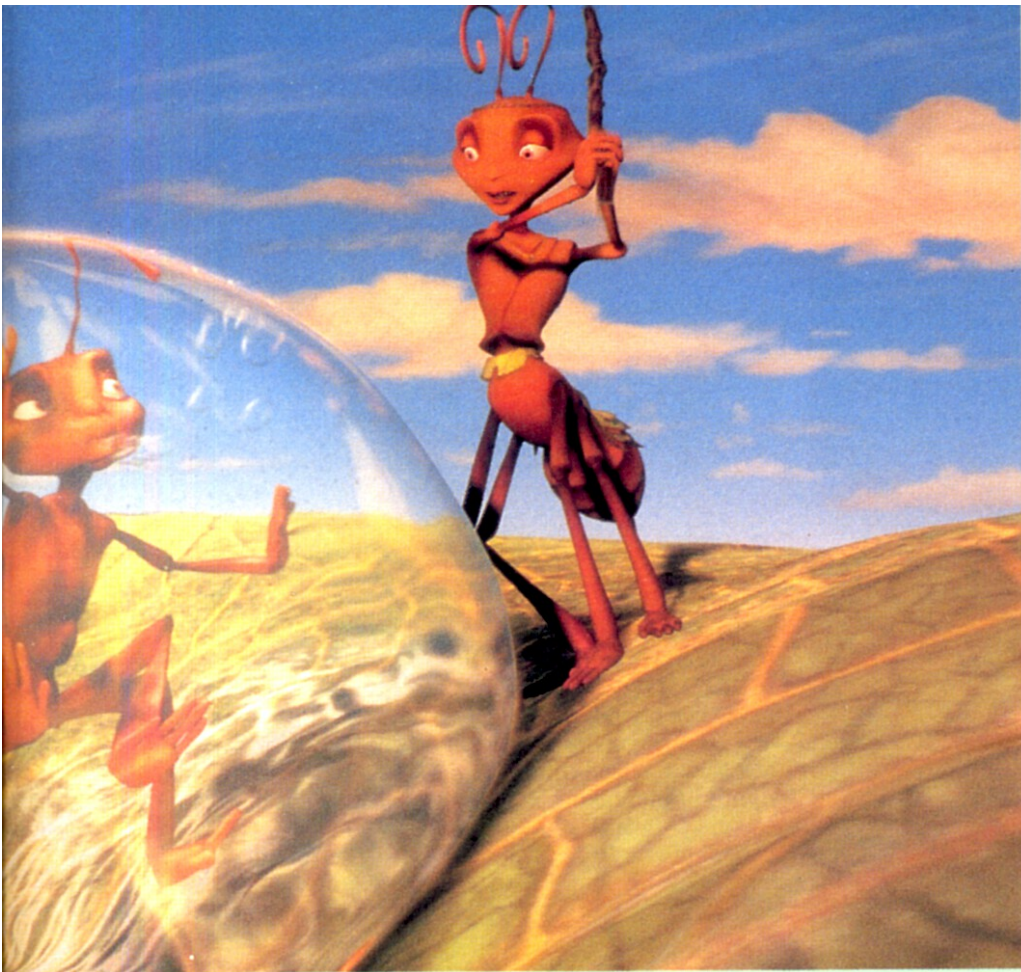
In the film, the disheartened Z finds himself kicked out of the colony, along with the princess of the colony, Bala. Together, through their journey and the ensuing revolution, they learn the life lessons of choice and individuality.

The angst-ridden voice of Z is provided by none other than Woody Allen, in what may rank as the year's biggest casting coup. "The character was pretty much structured around the idea of Woody Allen," noted Warner. "He fit so perfectly that everything just kind of followed from there."

Allen actually headlines a cast of voices that reads like the Beverly Hills phone book. Sylvester Stallone, Meryl Streep, Gene Hackman, Danny Glover, Dan Aykroyd, Jennifer Lopez and Sharon Stone are just some of the other familiar names in the credits. "We taped every actor's recording sessions and their faces were used as references," Warner said. "They were all very expressive and their voices and body movements all got taken into consideration. But, when it came to character design, there was no conscious effort to try and make the

Eager to overcome a colony conformity, Z sets his sights on the beautiful Princess Bala.





Princess Bala (right, voiced by Sharon Stone) tries to free the hapless Z, trapped in a water droplet.

character look like the actor who was playing the part. There are little bits and pieces of the actors in their characters, but we tried not to be that specific with it."

One cast member providing a font of inspiration for the animators was Christopher Walken, who, with his flair for improvisation, brings his distinct tone to the character of Cutter, an officer in the ant army. "He, as usual, took basic written language and turned it into a new form," laughed Warner. "It's a beautiful performance. It's quirky and scary and threatening, without being over-the-top. It's also very heartfelt, because he's one of the characters with the biggest 'turns' in the film. He really comes to see that what he's doing as an officer is not right and that he has to take a stand in order to change things. He brought all of those different elements into the character. Animating his performance was fun, because he's obviously really expressive and there are a lot of pauses where pauses wouldn't be. The animators really captured him. You know immediately who it is when he starts talking."

This decidedly different approach to character devel-

opment is evident in the villain of ANTZ, the leader, General Mandible (voiced by Hackman) who emerges as more than just the prototypical bad guy. "We tried to not go over-the-top and have this moustache-twirling evil guy," added Warner. "We have a character who feels that what he's doing is right. In his mind the only issue is: 'Can he make a better colony?' He feels that he has to make the world in his image and that's the only right thing to do. So, he's not an evil, tying-people-to-the-railroad-tracks

Among the all-star vocal talent in the DreamWorks' debut CGI feature is Oscar-winner Gene Hackman, who provides the voice for the film's villain, General Mandible (below).



“It’s a lot darker than you might expect from an animated film. There has been an effort to make the movie as adult as possible.”

—Producer Aron Warner—

character, he has his plan and that's how he has to proceed."

For the backdrop of ANTZ, the filmmakers tried to give audiences a glimpse into a world they've never experienced before. "It's a lot darker than what you might expect from an animated film," noted Warner. "It's not photo-real. We didn't want to make a film that looked like we tried to do photo-real and failed. Right now technology is not up to speed on doing completely photo-realistic environments. So, it's stylized and fantastical, but believable."

In addition to the technology, the artistry and the celebrity behind ANTZ, it's the enthusiasm Jeffrey Katzenberg has shown for the project and for the craft of animation itself that has also fueled the film. "As a producer, I've never before had the creative input that I've had on this movie," said Warner. "I've never worked with anyone as passionate as Jeffrey. The man loves animation; he lives and breathes it. It's torturous sometimes, but also really amazing to see somebody who cares so much about what he's doing and that it's not a put-on—'Let's show the outside world that this is what we're about'—this is who he is." Katzenberg honed his skills for the medium while helping to initiate the animation resurgence at Disney and now at DreamWorks, with films like ANTZ, he hopes to take it to a whole new level.

"There's been an effort to not so much make it a theme or message movie, but to make it as 'adult' as possible," noted Warner. "Never having worked on an animated film before, one of the things that surprised me about the process and about working with Jeffrey, given his background at Disney, was his insistence that we 'adultify' it wherever we could. He wanted us to make the characters' performances, the animation and the vocal performances, more real."

In other words, for round one of "The Big Bug Off," DreamWorks is coming out swinging. □

URB

“True” horror stories

By Paul Wardle

URBAN LEGEND is a project shrouded in mystery. Only the barest details of the plot have been provided to the press. The story begins when students at a New England college begin dying in increasing numbers. Natalie (Alicia Witt) suspects a pattern of murders based on ur-

ban legends. A simple enough premise, but the details are top secret. It gets confusing when cryptic remarks from cast members leave doubt as to whether all the deaths are real, in context of the story, whether the lead character will also suffer her demise at the end of the film, or whether it is all some sick prank by a fellow student.

The film boasts a first-time director, Jamie Blanks; a first-time screenwriter, Sylvio Horta; and first-time producer Gina Matthews. With a young cast and so many inexperienced people on board, it is surprising that the production has had few real problems. These are hard-working professionals who take their work more seriously than they take themselves. There is a definite lack of pretension in the air at the downtown Toronto location where scenes are being filmed inside a converted library. In the movie, it is a radio station with giant picture windows and flashing lights like the inside of a dance club. While various murders and attempted murders are being preserved on film, Gina Matthews took time out to discuss what has been for her a very rewarding project.

The producer, who also manages scripter Sylvio Horta, recalled with fondness the steps that led to working on URBAN LEGEND. “I told him, ‘Writing assignments and all that stuff is kind of a waste of time,’” said Matthews. “Why don’t we create a story and go out and pitch?’ We went through twenty ideas, and he looked at me and said, at one point, ‘Students are being murdered at a college campus based on urban legends,’ I said, ‘That’s the one.’”

The story was developed over the next two weeks. “Then



Above: Good girl Natalie (Alicia Witt) is stalked by the unseen killer. She suspects that a series of murders is following a pattern based on old urban legends. Right: radio sex therapist guru Sasha (Tara Reid) and her boyfriend Parker (Michael Rosenbaum) remain unaware of the danger while practicing a page from the *Kama Sutra*. Below: Natalie discovers the killer's latest victim.



AN LEGEND

come to life in this teen terror slash fest.

we went out to buyers," said Matthews. "I had been friends with Brad Luff, the executive producer on this movie, and we'd been looking for a way to do a movie together. Neal Moritz [another producer on URBAN LEGEND] had just gotten done producing I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER, so I knew he could help us. The three of us pitched it to Phoenix Pictures together, and they bought it. Sylvio started writing the script in August, and after they saw his first draft, they gave the green light."

Newcomer Jamie Blanks landed the directing gig. Gina Matthews explained, "Jamie had done a short that a lot of people in Hollywood had seen, Neal Moritz being one of them, and he met with Jamie for I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER. He had never directed a full movie, and the studio's like, 'The kid's 25 years-old!' So Jamie went back to Australia with the script for I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER, took money from his own pocket, and made a trailer for the film. Neal was impressed, but they had hired another director by then."

The quality of Blanks' trailer was so exceptional that he was promised a project in the future, which led to URBAN LEGEND. "Jamie's made a lot of shorts and he probably knows everything about every horror movie in the world. He is a genius when it comes to the genre," said Matthews. "And Sylvio really believed in the genre and wrote an amazing draft. Everybody's so excited to be working together that, as a first-time producer, I never could have expected it to be this good. Jamie as the director real-

"There's no gore in the movie at all," said Blanks. "I'm keeping all the violence off screen. It's much better to get a reaction out of viewers by creating suspense."



First-time director Jamie Blanks (center) directs Jared Leto and Michael Rosenbaum as students facing murders based on old urban legends.

ly sets the tone for the movie, and I think the whole cast and crew feels the same way.

"Also, people want to do the movie because the script's really good," Matthews continued. "We're talking to unbelievably talented composers that are hugely expensive and they want to do the movie! It's rare to get a script that rocks and a director that's amazing, and a cast who are all perfect in their roles, and they not only work well together, we all hang out together on the weekends. I think that shows in the movie. I think people will be able to feel it. It's a real, sincere energy."

Not that production has been easy: "Our first four weeks

were exterior shots in the pouring rain." the producer continued. "It was just horrible. But then again, I'm from Oregon originally. I could be pulling greenchain. You're outside, running around being filmed. To most of America, it's gotta be the most glamorous, luxurious thing in the world."

Jamie Blanks echoes these sentiments. "I've been making films since I was eight years old," he said. "And I watch a lot of movies too, which helped a lot," said Blanks. A self-confessed horror movie buff and fan of *Cinefantastique* and other genre film magazines, he comes to the industry well armed with knowledge of horror film histo-

ry. "I've got an amazing crew, an amazing group of producers who have been behind me every step of the way. It's just the best thing that's ever happened to me."

At first, Blanks was slightly intimidated by the size of the job, but he quickly rose to the challenge. "I was a little nervous the first day," he admitted, "We had a big day with a lot of extras, and I'd never even been on the set of a feature film until day one of my own shoot, so it was pretty spooky. But then, I settled right into it."

He is under pressure to prove himself with this feature, and to make something that will have the appeal of SCREAM. "We can definitely credit SCREAM with reviving the genre, and telling the studios that kids still want to see good horror films," he reasoned.

"There's no gore in the movie at all," he added. "We see a couple of aftermath shots and things like that, but essentially, I'm keeping all the violence off screen. I'm playing it more for suspense and scares and laughs. We can achieve anything we want with makeup effects and CGI these days. It's much better to get a reaction out of an audience by creating suspense."

Among Jamie Blanks' favorite modern horror movies is HALLOWEEN. That film was a big influence on his style and his desire to dedicate himself to returning that kind of suspense to the horror genre. URBAN LEGEND, he thinks, was a good choice to begin his career.

"I got the script first," he remembered, "and Neal Moritz, who was the first one to see my trailer, called me and said he'd really like to find a film for me."

URBAN LEGEND

LESLIE SEBERT

Making up some urban legends.

One of the key people on the set of **URBAN LEGEND** is Leslie Sebert. The numerous wounds that occur in this story of mysterious deaths at a college campus translate into chemical and cosmetic creations by Sebert. Blood, cuts, bruises, scars, and wounds are part of her job, just as blush and eyeshadow are. She is frequently in demand on set, not only to touch up makeup on faces, but to make sure the fake blood reacts well with the lighting and matches the previous shot in sequence.

"What we did, before we started the production, was a blood test, to test all the different types of fake bloods that are out there," Sebert explained.

How many kinds could there be?

"There's tons!" she revealed. "We went through gallons and gallons of it. You can make your own, which is very simple, but most beauty supply companies have their own brand. They tested 13 different colors and 13 different types."

The number 13 connected with a horror movie? Hmmm.

"For this particular lighting, because we're shooting at night, they wanted a lighter, brighter blood, so that it would show up. In a daytime scene, we would use a different color. In one scene where [a character is found dead a day later], the blood is darker."

Though the actual recipe for the blood she's using in this movie is a closely guarded secret, Leslie said that most bloods are composed of food coloring, water, molasses, and a variety of chemical additives. The "Cryolin brand," a ready-made compound, turned out to be the best for her purposes here.

Blood is actually a large part of her work, she said: "Pretty well every movie I've ever worked on, I've done something like this: a cut, a bruise, a bullet hole."

This makes her highly sought after at Halloween. Though she says it's her favorite holiday, Sebert confessed that she hides at Halloween. "It's too much like



Makeup artist Leslie Sebert (seen at front left, working on Alicia Witt) brings to life the many deaths, wounds, and injuries featured in **URBAN LEGEND**.

what I do at work," she admitted.

As originally written, the script could have been showering the screen with blood, but lucky for Leslie, director Jamie Blanks opted for a more off-screen suspense feel to the killings, with only a few scenes of actual gore. In his hands, it's become more of a psychological thriller, according to Sebert. "There's nothing scarier than your imagination," she pointed out.

Leslie's interest in the industry was sparked by her father's previous involvement. "My father was a director/cameraman, and I used to go and watch him. I met a makeup artist when I was 12, and then I started training for [my career] when I was 14, taking private lessons. When you take these courses, learning from professional makeup artists, you don't just learn glamour. You also learn [how to do] aging and bullet holes, everything. I already knew from my father that it wasn't all glamour, and thank God! Otherwise it would be totally boring. I love doing this kind of stuff."

Among other recent projects for Leslie Sebert were the continuity bruises in **GOOD WILL**

HUNTING. Matching the bruises while shooting in different cities and filming the scenes out of sequence kept things interesting for her, and kept her mind working during the long hours. "You progress the wounds too, because you see them fresh, then you see them the next day and two weeks later, and you have to change the colour. It's fun!" she explained.

In order to keep that continuity seamless for the audience, the makeup artist's job begins early in the production. "You work out the continuity yourself. That's part of the paperwork, as the head of the department. And you work with the script person and do a breakdown yourself. You arrive in the morning and you see what scenes are to be shot and work it all out," said Sebert.

Her advice to those who are interested in makeup artistry for film is to start from the bottom. "I totally believe," Sebert cautions, "that they should do as much as they can: freebie movies, theatre, whatever they can get their hands on—just to get that on-set or on-stage experience. Especially if they want to get into special effects. Go out and buy a special effects book.

There's a lot of good books out there. You can start experimenting at home on your friends and at Halloween. A lot of people complain about how expensive makeup courses are, but once you start working, you get it back. You get paid well. The only way to do it is to start at the bottom. You cannot go on a set as a key makeup artist without experience. I had seven years experience on feature films before I became a key. It was probably more than I needed," she laughs. "but when I became a key, I never screwed up because I've experienced it. You don't fake it. Sometimes you might get away with faking it, but you shouldn't. Be equipped and be ready. A big part of being a makeup artist on set is being last-minute quick. On this movie, big time!"

In one instance, her ready-for-anything theory was put to the test. As she explained, "One death we were shooting, in preproduction, they said there would be no cuts on the body. Then, three minutes before they were ready to shoot, they told me, 'We want a cut with blood running down.' And you've gotta do it. I just said, 'Okay' and I did it, and it looked great, and everybody loved it. If it's your first time on set and something like that happens, you're just going to freak out and have a heart attack."

Then she revealed another interesting point in all this. "A lot of makeup artists don't have blood experience or special effects experience, and they go on a set and in pre-production they ask for bruises and cuts and they have to say they don't know how to do it. They use the excuse that [it's a special effects person's job], but it's makeup actually."

This does not apply to prosthetics and rubber masks, but virtually everything up to that point. Her willingness to cross over into special effects makeup has resulted in high demand for Leslie Sebert's services, and after all, isn't that what every working person needs?

Paul Wardle

It was great. He was very supportive. I loved the script. The first scene just blew me away. I read a lot of scripts, and there's a lot of bad ones out there. This was definitely one of the best ones I've ever read."

For a horror film fan (JAWS is his favorite film), this project is certainly a dream come true. "There was an opportunity last year to do a couple of movies, but I decided to hold out for something good," he said. "A lot of directors jump in and direct another FRIDAY THE 13TH. movie and then you never here from them again. I'm only 26. I had time to wait. This is a really wonderful script. I worked with the writer and the producers and fleshed it out and really improved it and I think what we're shooting is really smart."

For a newcomer, the shoot has been relatively problem-free. "No, actually, in many ways it's been the easiest film-making experience of my life!" he replied. "In every other film I've ever made, I've been the one setting up the crane shot, going to book the locations, and trying to convince people to appear in them for nothing. People that complain about budget limitations obviously aren't very good at thinking on their feet."

Jamie Blanks won't complain. He's happy to *have* a budget for the first time in his life. "We haven't had an exorbitant amount of money at our disposal, but we've been able to do some big things that have gone well and still brought them under budget." Blanks said. "I thought it was going to be a lot tougher than it has been. I thought the politics were gonna be a lot tougher, the actors' egos were gonna be a lot harder to deal with; and everybody's behind me. It's just a really great experience. I'm surprised at how much faith everyone has in me based on how little work I've done, but I'm very passionate about it and I hope that's infectious. It's very exciting to work with this young cast who are all talented and who's careers are, I'm sure, on the way up."

The time constraints were so short that editing of the film had already taken place in May in order to have the picture ready

"We all have sick thoughts," said Reid. "A movie's your chance to see those thoughts become a reality. And it's okay. You won't get in trouble."



Witt (with Rebecca Gayheart as Brenda), avoided looking at the dead bodies until her scenes began shooting so her horrified reaction would be more real.

for its proposed October release. Blanks explained, "The film editor comes out to the set and brings me cut footage and on weekends, I get out there and work with him. I'm gonna cut a trailer soon for the picture we're doing now."

Among the cast members are Alicia Witt, Tara Reid, Michael Rosenbaum, Rebecca Gayheart, Joshua Jackson, Loretta Devine, and Jared Leto. Witt's portrayal of Natalie, the student who first suspects murder, is in stark contrast to other characters. Natalie is sweet and studious, a teacher's pet. The others all have distinct personalities, like the wise-cracking Parker (Rosenbaum) and the sassy sex therapist embodied by the dazzling Tara Reid.

Reid volunteered to do her own stunts whenever possible, including hanging from an overhead railing and dropping. She was harnessed in place, and had four professional stunt people checking the apparatus fastidiously, certain that she was in no danger before the shot began. In another scene she is running from an axe murderer in a ski mask. Her character's job at a campus radio station is

to host a call-in radio show about sex. Her frank off-the-cuff remarks and her sexy attire in the studio give the definite impression that she knows what she's talking about, often giving a detailed answer that anticipates the question before it is even finished being asked.

Despite her flashy good looks (she spends much of her time on-screen in short, low-cut nightgowns, thigh-high boots with six inch platform heels, spiked wristbands and

collars and fur coats), she is a fine actress. She also has no problem with the graphic horror content of the movies in general.

She believes that "people want to see nasty stuff. We all have sick thoughts. Anyone who says they don't is lying. And a movie's your chance to see those sick thoughts become a reality. And it's okay. You won't get in trouble. It's a chance for them to watch their imagination come to life. That's what I think, and that's okay."

In contrast to this view is Witt, whose all-American sweetness comes quite close to that of her screen character in URBAN LEGEND. Witt told director Jamie Blanks not to let her see the dead bodies in scenes she was in until the shoot was about to commence—that way her look of horror would be real. "I get so disturbed by even the mention of violence or blood," she revealed, and said that her vivid imagination crept her out enough already, without watching gory horror films. Even little suggestive scenes of psychological terror bother her immensely. Like the others, she was lured by the script, but as the leading lady, she admitted, "It's a lot of work."

The film is due to be released on October 9th, 1998. "That's our hope date," Matthews vowed last Spring. "We're on schedule. We're editing as we go. The dailies look great. Everybody's working to meet that date, and I think we'll do it!" □

Scared but prepared, Witt's Natalie has armed herself with a "shrieker" in hopes of warding off any potential attackers.



PRACTICAL M

Denise DiNovi on producing the best-seller

By Mitch Persons

Warner Bros.' *PRACTICAL MAGIC*, based on the novel by Alice Hoffman, is about Sally Owens, a placid, seemingly level-headed single mother, and her hot-blooded, impulsive sister, Gillian. One horrendous night a situation enters the women's lives which is so confounding that Sally and Gillian feel that the only way it can be resolved is by magic. The solution is not as over-the-top as it first appears. Both Gillian and Sally have been tutored in the dark arts by their great-aunts Frances and Jett, two superannuated and temperamentally diverse ladies who also happen to be witches.

Adapted by Robin Swicord, *PRACTICAL MAGIC* was produced by Denise Di Novi, (*EDWARD SCISSORHANDS*, *LITTLE WOMEN*), and directed by Griffin Dunne (*ADDICTED TO LOVE*.) The film stars Sandra Bullock and Nicole Kidman as, respectively, Sally and Gillian, Aidan Quinn and Goran Visnjic as the men in their lives, and Stockard Channing and Dianne Wiest as the wicca aunts.

"Alice Hoffman has always been one of my favorite novelists," said producer Di Novi, "I've loved all her books, and *Practical Magic*, when I read it, became the one I liked the best. Hoffman has a great way of mixing the surreal and the real and integrating magic into daily life. I love that aspect of her books. When Robin Swicord, who adapted *LITTLE WOMEN* for us, wrote the first draft of the screenplay, I really saw how it could be a great movie. The script tells how magic is present in everyday life and every moment if we are just aware of it. There have been so many things that have happened to me or other people, like love at first sight, or those funny things that happen with your kids when you just know when they're sick or they're in trouble, or the kinds of things that we don't like to analyze too much, but we know are magical and they're gifts that have been given to us. The movie celebrates that.

"The story is about these two sisters who are very different from one another, and how they cope with being born into this long lineage of women gifted by being magical witches. Actually, despite the undercurrents of magic and witchcraft, *PRACTICAL MAGIC* is primarily a story



L to r: Nicole Kidman, director Griffin Dunne, producer Denise DiNovi, and Sandra Bullock.

about love. It is about how these two women deal with love. Sally runs away from it, and Gillian runs headlong into it—in a very impetuous and irresponsible way. When Gillian brings home this bad guy, Jimmy, the sisters' world turns upside down. Jimmy eventually expires, but he's such a tough customer that he refuses to stay dead. There is a happy twist in that the policeman who comes to investigate Jimmy's death is the man who is destined to be Sally's one true love. That's where this very beautiful love tale comes about.

"This is also a family film, but by 'family' I don't necessarily mean a G-rating. Rather, *PRACTICAL MAGIC* is a movie that celebrates the family as a unit. There are the two sisters, who have a testy but genuinely loving relationship, the two great-aunts who appear sinister, but are actually warm-hearted, and then there are Sally's two children, who are emotional mirror-images of Gillian and Sally.

"*PRACTICAL MAGIC* is very hard to nail down in terms of genre. It's not a horror movie, even though it has scary elements and some pretty fabulous special effects. It's not just a love story, although love plays a large part in the action. There's this very romantic, great love that exists between the characters that Sandy [Bullock] and Aidan Quinn play, but the interplay just becomes another facet of a very complex film. I do

believe, though, that the facets all come together in a very integrated way.

"Sally Owens is a woman that we can all relate to. She's a single mother. She's somebody who's really trying hard to keep it all together. But she knows she's different. She's been gifted by being this magical witch, and she is a little embarrassed by that. She doesn't really want to feel different. She wants to be normal and she's really trying hard to appear to be so. She's also yearning for love. She has that deep longing that we've all felt at different points in our lives: to find that one true love, that right person that is going to make us feel whole. And she wants that love very badly, but she's still afraid of it because she's seen, through her experiences, the pain that love causes. She also has a problem, as all the women in the Owens family have, and that is that they are cursed to lose their true love once they really love that person. That aspect of the story is sort of a metaphor for what we all feel. I think we all believe at times that we're cursed—we're never going to find *that* person. If we do, it's not going to work out.

"Gillian is a more contradictory person. She is somebody that sometimes you would think, maybe she's not the most reliable, maybe she's not making the best decisions. On the other hand, she's somebody who has a really good heart and is desperately trying

MAGIC

for the screen.

to make things right. But she's attracted to The Dark Side too often. She's addicted to excitement and living on the edge. What underlies her living her life that way is that, like her sister, she is longing for love. The more she longs for it, the more she seems to attract the wrong sort of men, like Jimmy.

"With these characters being as unique as they are, we wanted to have actors who could more than meet the challenge of portraying them. Sandra Bullock was cast very early on. Sally Owens is a warm, intelligent woman, with a wry sense of humor. Sandy brings an ingratiating humanity to all her characters. And she has a very particular, personal style of comedy that's pretty adorable and hard to resist.

"Nicole Kidman is somebody I have wanted to work with for years. I've admired all of her performances. I think she brings a real detailed, specific way of dealing with characters. She inhabits them in a way that is fascinating to watch. She works from the inside out. What she's brought to the role of Gillian, well, it's sort of hard to describe, but the minute she walked on the set with the costuming and the wig and the makeup, it was just like Gillian had come to life from the book. That was an exciting moment.

"On the male side, we have Aidan Quinn, who plays the detective, Gary Hallet. When we were casting for Gary, we had the image of another Gary in mind: Gary Cooper. We wanted somebody who had that vibration of being good and honest and decent—the kind of man whom you would meet and never feel that he would do the wrong thing. Aidan has that. He has that in life and he has that in his films. And also, like Cooper, he has these incredible cornflower-blue eyes! Those eyes of his really lent themselves to our story, because it does, after all, deal with magic, and Aidan's eyes are, in a word, magical.

"We are fortunate in having actors who do bring this dynamic magic quality to PRACTICAL MAGIC. Goran Visnjic takes on the role of Gillian's roughneck boyfriend, Jimmy. Goran is a gorgeous man and a brilliant actor. He's brought levels to a fairly one-dimensional character that we never imagined, and the chemistry between him and Nicole is really, really amazing. Jimmy is a Bulgarian who has emigrated to Arizona and is obsessed by everything



Above: Sisters Sally (Sandra Bullock) and Gillian (Nicole Kidman) prepare a spell in PRACTICAL MAGIC.
Below: Stockard Channing and Diane Weist play the aunts who tutored the girls in witchcraft.





Troubled romance: Gillian's no-good boyfriend Jimmy (Goran Visnjic) just won't stay dead.

Western and everything to do with cowboys. He's not only captivated with the West, but with the darker side of life. He leans toward magic—not good, white magic, but the more sinister black magic. The truth is, this man who is not a witch or a warlock is much more drawn to The Dark Side than either Gillian or Sally.

"PRACTICAL MAGIC is Goran's first American film. We chose him for Jimmy after seeing him in WELCOME TO SARAJEVO. Goran had to face a lot of technical challenges that he hadn't encountered before, but he more than rose to the occasion. There is a part in the film where Jimmy, who is supposed to be deceased, comes back as a ghost. We thrust Goran into these situations where he was doing green screen and having to mime all these strange actions on the set for effects which would be added later. And he was just brilliant.

"Completing the cast are Stockard Channing as Aunt Frances and Dianne Wiest as Aunt Jett. Frances is a lady who is afraid of no one; she always has the right answer and is never, never intimidated by anything. Also, like her niece Sally, she can be very funny in the same dry, witty way. Out of the two aunts, she is the one that everybody is a little bit afraid of, but also admires. Stockard has a natural dignity and intelligence that really comes through. She's beautifully matched with the character of Frances.

"I was thrilled to work with Dianne Wiest again. She was with us on EDWARD SCISSORHANDS. In EDWARD SCISSORHANDS Dianne brought sort of an Earth Mother kindness to her part—the kind of woman who just lived goodness and kindness. The role is echoed in PRACTICAL MAGIC, because Jett is the sweeter, kinder witch—almost the yin to

Frances' yang. She balances the acidity of Frances, and she does it all with this very transcendent, beautiful tenderness.

"Griffin Dunne, our director, has taken the talents of these extraordinary people and merged them into a literate, cohesive whole. I had always admired Griffin when he was an actor. He did such a superb job in AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON. When I first heard he was directing, I went to see this short film that he had made, THE DUKE OF GROOVE. I just loved it. I loved the performances, all the nuances. It had a real humanity and a real appreciation for those wonderful moments in life. Then I saw ADDICTED TO LOVE, which I was also very impressed with. I liked the way Griffin juggled all the different tones in that film. That juggling, I felt, was very

important for PRACTICAL MAGIC, because PRACTICAL MAGIC crosses many genres; it embodies many stories and many tones. So I perceived that Griffin would relate to this new material. I knew he would really appreciate the themes of the film and be able to pull it all together.

"The fact that Griffin was first an actor has a great deal to do with his ability as a director. In my opinion, actors make the best directors, because what are movies about, after all, but performance? If you don't have good performances, the rest doesn't really matter that much. It's a beautiful thing to see Griffin direct because he understands performance, and what makes performance work on film. That comes solely from his training as an actor.

"Griffin has also served as a producer on films like BABY IT'S YOU and RUNNING ON EMPTY, so that made him a triple-threat man. He knows all the challenges and all the tricks of the trade. You see him working with the actors and you see the incredible chemistry he has with them. He really knows what an actor needs to hear; he knows what they need to do to get a characterization across on film. And his timing is absolutely perfect. He understands how words need to be translated from page to mouth. I've been involved in quite a few films myself, but it's always an education for me to see someone who is as sensitive to performance as Griffin is. All the acting, from the two little girls who play Sandy's daughters, to Sandra and Nicole, Aidan and Goran, and Stockard and Dianne, is just honed to perfection.

"But let's not forget, as ingenious and capable as Griffin is, he is working with some of the finest actors in the film business. I couldn't think of a more talented cast than the one we have on PRACTICAL MAGIC. From where I stand, that's practical magic in itself." □

Jimmy's death brings Detective Halet (Aidan Quinn) into the life of Sally (Bullock).



PRACTICAL MAGIC

UNDEAD DIRECTOR

Griffin Dunne on capturing everyday enchantment.

PRACTICAL MAGIC is about witchcraft and enchantment in people's everyday lives," said director Griffin Dunne. "Before taking on this assignment, my relationship to the word 'magic' was restricted to watching card tricks and rabbits being pulled out of hats. I never really had a very strong interest in that. And I wasn't a real big believer in witches, either. But, I did always believe in things that were unexplainable. I believe that people can read each other's thoughts, and predict the future, and maybe even have past lives. When I found out I was going to direct this film, I read Alice Hoffman's novel, and saw how cleverly she interwove the unexplainable with the everyday. My opinion of magic, and yes, even of witches, started to do a turnaround. These women in the book are witches, but they aren't old hags that just stepped out of *MACBETH*. They are very real, very believable characters who just happen to have inherited these extraordinary supernatural gifts.

"Our scriptwriter, Robin Swicord, took the tone and character of Hoffman's novel and turned it into a phenomenal screenplay. Here are the sisters, Gillian and Sally, who appear to behave just like anybody else. They eat junk food, agonize about the men in their lives, worry over their offspring, and at the same time, they have these amazing paranormal powers. They have the ability to raise the dead, but instead of resorting to amulets and magic wands, they use commonplace stuff, like Captain Crunch Cereal and Redi-Whip. The mixture of the normal and the above-normal is a recurring theme in this film. All these wild, inexplicable things are happening, and these Owens women pretty much just take things in stride. They know what



Director Griffin Dunne (who played the sarcastic walking corpse in *AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON*) on the set of *PRACTICAL MAGIC*, with Sandra Bullock.

they are, what they can do, and they just do it.

"It's fascinating, too, that like the mundane and the exceptional, all the other elements in *PRACTICAL MAGIC* move in pairs, as well. We have the black-toned love, which is Gillian's for Jimmy the bum, and the white-toned love, which is Sally's for the detective, Gary. There are two witch aunts, two sisters, and Sally's two daughters. There are pairs of divergent personalities: Aunt Frances is caustic and intimidating, and Aunt Jett is sweet and accommodating; Gillian is a wild, hit-the-road type, and Sally is more docile and domestic.

"The role of Sally is actually a very complex one. Despite her outward semblance of normalcy, Sally is a very troubled lady. She's different, and she knows it. All she's really wanted is to have friends, but she's been shunned her whole life. When her sister Gillian runs away, Sally is left to be raised by these two old aunts, so she be-

comes very lonely and very melancholy. She has a real sorrow about her. I think that she believes that everybody is happy in the world except her. In itself, that wouldn't be too different an emotion than most of us have felt, but she also has the stigma of being raised by these women who have led anything but normal lives.

"In addition, Sally is painfully aware that there is a curse on the family that says that death will come to any man that an Owens woman will allow herself to love. So she shies away from love. Maybe she uses the curse as an excuse, or maybe the curse is real, but toward the close of the story, she is almost saved by it; she is saved by the love of Gary.

"Love doesn't appear to do much for Sally's sister, Gillian. Gillian reminds me of a Country-Western song: someone who's looking for love in all the wrong places. If she loves someone, it's the wrong guy. She just has the worst taste in men in the history of

women. This one man she winds up with, Jimmy, is a loser from the word go. He's an addict, an ex-con, a real sociopath.

"It may sound callous of me to say this, but there is something in the character of Gillian that tells me that she longs to be with somebody so horrible. It seems that Gillian is constantly looking for trouble, and she always finds it. She has this abusive, obsessive relationship with this man. Gillian says she wants out; she's too scared of Jimmy and what he might do to her, but I think that down deep she doesn't want to go through life without him.

"Yet there is a more right-minded, sensitive side to Gillian. She genuinely loves her sister, her aunts, her nieces. She ran away from her family because she felt that by being so unlucky in the romance department she had let them down. And she believes—and I'm not trying to be humorous here—that she's not a very good witch. A little bit like being a bad student. She's ashamed of her inadequacy, both as a sorceress and as a woman.

"With all this emphasis on Gillian and Sally, and Frances and Jett, with Jimmy and Gary being more or less catalysts, I have been frequently asked if *PRACTICAL MAGIC* is primarily a 'woman's picture.' It is a fact that the writer of the novel, our producer, Denise Di Novi, and 90% of the cast are women. I always answer that no, *PRACTICAL MAGIC* isn't a woman's picture. It isn't even a picture about women. I come from a good home, where I loved my mom, and that I believe is what *PRACTICAL MAGIC* is all about. It's a story about love, about character, it's about familial relationships—and nowadays, families can be anything, all-male, all-female, first parents, second parents, adopted parents...even witches."

Mitch Persons

MILL

TV's best kept



The best kept secret on television last season was **MILLENNIUM**, which offered some of the year's most thoughtful, imaginative, and suspenseful story-telling. Unfortunately, the second season received virtually no build-up—quite a contrast to the campaign waged by the Fox Network for the debut in 1996; since the noticeable drop in ratings after the premiere, the network no longer exerted a major effort to promote the show. The losers were the television audience, both first and second seasons.

For the second season, creator Chris Carter turned the show over to others while working on the fifth season and feature film of **THE X-FILES**. Glen Morgan and James Wong, who had served as consulting producers during the first season, were tapped for the job. New writers joined the staff. Glen's brother Darin signed on, and wrote and directed two episodes. Michael Perry, who had won an Emmy for an episode of **NYPD BLUE** co-written with Steve Gagahn, had been recruited by Chris Carter. Morgan and Wong also brought on board writing partners Erin Maher and Kay Reindl. Held over from first season were Chip Johannessen and Robert Moresco.

Both critics and the audience had expressed the opinion that **MILLENNIUM**'s first season was too grim, violent, and monotonous, with the majority of episodes devoted to serial killer plots and not enough time spent on Frank's inner life or the Millennium Group. The network wanted changes, and Morgan and Wong were happy to oblige. "There was too much gore in the first season, and it was for shock's sake," Morgan said. "There was no humor. Everybody wanted to know more about the Millennium Group. What was Frank's role with them? We needed to develop Frank. We had a good actress, Megan Gallagher, playing his wife, and what could we do with their relationship? Where can this go?"

Not everyone agreed with the changes, including some of the producing and writing staff who had been retained from the first year. "I think it was good to open up the show a little in terms of its tone," Johannessen said.

**BY PAULA
VITARIS**



James Wong and Glen Morgan executive produced season two of **MILLENNIUM**, reviving the show with such episodes as "The Curse of Frank Black," which takes place on a very haunted Halloween.

MILLENNIUM

secret improves in its sophomore season.

"To my taste, some of the stuff became much more adolescent, and it changed the center of gravity a little bit—but it did open up the show."

Despite first year problems, Morgan and Wong believed *MILLENNIUM* possessed a number of strong elements. They had a strong leading man in Lance Henriksen as Frank Black. They were also intrigued by the symbolism of Frank's yellow house, his ideal home. "What really appealed to me was that Chris had said that he had made the show because of the Blacks' yellow house," Morgan noted. "This year was an opportunity to make a hero-myth of the story: take the house away from Frank, have him go through the dark forest, and get back to the yellow house."

At the beginning of the second season, Morgan and Wong sat down with Carter and explained their ideas. Carter told them to go ahead, and although they consulted with him during the season, he had very little input. Carter had been planning to write and direct an episode but eventually backed off due to his *X-FILES* responsibilities.

In the season opener, "The Beginning and the End," Morgan and Wong quickly resolved the kidnapping cliffhanger from last season. Frank's stalker, The Polaroid Man (Doug Hutchison), was now holding Catherine captive and taunting Frank. By the end of the episode, Frank has located them and killed the Polaroid Man, precipitating a crisis in Catherine, who is afraid of the feelings of hatred and anger she senses both within herself and Frank. She asks him to move out so she can gain some perspective. In the second episode, "Beware of the Dog," Morgan and Wong introduced a character known as the Old Man (R.G. Armstrong, a long-time favorite of Morgan's) who acts as a spiritual guide for Frank and begins to expose him to the arcane knowledge of the Millennium Group.

The third episode, "Sense and Anti-Sense," written by Chip Johannessen, was a government conspiracy about bio-terrorism that seemed more appropriate to *THE X-FILES*. "That didn't quite come off the way I'd hoped," Johannessen said. "That was one of these tortured things. To my mind, the rewrites got colossally worse, and part of that had to do with the fact that the first draft concerned a much more sensitive area—race—and Broadcast Standards had



Darin Morgan's off-beat "Somehow, Satan Got Behind Me" pushed the show's demons into the foreground.

certain concerns."

The fourth episode, "Monster," about accusations of abuse at a day care center and the evil within one particular child, introduced a new recurring character, psychologist Lara Means, played by Morgan's wife Kristen Cloke (previously seen in Morgan and Wong's *SPACE: ABOVE AND BEYOND*). Lara, like Frank, is a candidate for the Millennium Group and, also like Frank, experiences visions. Unlike Frank, however, her visions, often of an angel, fill her with fear, and by season's end she suffers a complete mental collapse.

Morgan and Wong created Lara as a character who would both challenge and reflect Frank. "My biggest worry was that people would think we were trying to make them like Mulder and Scully," Morgan said. "We wanted somebody with an incredible gift to counter Frank. Right from the beginning the idea was to have Lara see these visions and know what the Millennium Group was saying, was true. Knowing that would drive her crazy because if the world is ending, what's the point of going on? Coupled with that, we had the Millennium Group saying, 'We not only have the responsibility of knowing; we have the responsibility of doing something about it.' The knowledge overloads her, and she goes

insane. By seeing that, Frank Black will have a person to compare and contrast himself to: 'This is my potential fate.' And that took him back to the yellow house. Lara is a possibility of what Frank could be. If you're going through the forest, you could get eaten by a troll, or you could get out. Lara did not get out of her dark forest. When the Millennium Group says to Frank, 'Do you want to become an initiated member? You're ready to move up a rank,' he can look at Lara and say, 'I don't know.' And yet, he believes in what she sees and that what the Group is after is right. It's such an extraordinary responsibility."

Another new character was computer wizard Brian Roedecker, played by Allan Zinyk, who had been in Darin Morgan's *X-FILES* episode "José Chung's 'From Outer Space.'" Roedecker was a sarcastic wisecracker created to serve as an occasional foil to the humorless Frank. Fans did not take kindly to Roedecker, who came across to them as a knock-off of *THE X-FILES*' Lone Gunmen and totally out of place on *MILLENNIUM*. "I was surprised by the rejection of Roedecker," Morgan admitted, adding that he wished the fans had given the character more time before pronouncing judgment. Roedecker remained a favorite with Morgan, however, and he and Wong



In "Luminary," Frank Black went on a rescue mission against orders of the Millennium Group.

ican crew. The story included a ceremony where rattler venom induced hallucinations. At Morgan's behest, Reindl and Maher restored Frank's gift—his near-psychic abilities—which had vanished early in the season. "I felt last year those visions were a cheat," Morgan said. "The camera would go to a coffee cup and Frank would say, 'The murderer used a coffee cup.' It drove me nuts. What we were trying to do this year was elevate Frank's visions to a dream-like state, so he would have to interpret what he's seeing. There would be more mystical, symbolic imagery that might give him more of a sense of what's going on. I had wanted to strip away the gift for a long time and see if the show really played without it. But we got back into that. The Old Man in 'Beware of the Dog' was trying to tell Frank, 'Your gift isn't gone; it's going to be different.'"

Maher and Reindl's next episode, "Midnight of the Century," examined Frank's relationship with his emotionally withdrawn father (Darren McGavin). The two writers had drawn the assignment of scripting "a scary Christmas episode." They rented every scary Christmas movie they could find, like *SILENT NIGHT*, *DEADLY NIGHT*. "We came up with an idea of doing 'A Christmas Carol' with Frank," Reindl said. "The three ghosts would be serial killers of the past, present and future. We pitched our board, and after the first act, Glen said, 'Did we talk about this at all?' And we said, 'Well, not really, just generally.' He said, 'Well, we have this scene in the Halloween episode.'" The scene Reindl and Maher had written was a flashback where a youthful Frank discovered his neighbor was a murderer. While not identical to the flashbacks in "The Curse of Frank Black," it

were disappointed when Zinyk left the show to fulfill another acting commitment.

A major goal for the season was to give Frank's life the kind of narrative drive absent last season, and many of the episodes dealt with his on-going relationship with Catherine, his estranged father, and his friendship with colleague Peter Watts (Terry O'Quinn). Intertwined with all this was Frank's growing knowledge of the Millennium Group's true nature and the ethical situations their actions forced him to confront. These episodes made for some of the season's strongest story-telling, particularly the extraordinary "The Curse of Frank Black," a surreal, ghostly journey from uncertainty to renewed determination, played out on the silent, wind-blown streets of Frank's neighborhood on Halloween night.

Since Frank is often alone in this episode (which was influenced by the Japanese ghost movie *KWAIDAN*), there is very little dialogue; much of the meaning is conveyed visually. "I didn't want to do any more dialogue," Morgan said. "Lance is so great with looks." The director was Ralph Hemecker, whom Morgan praised highly: "Ralph came up with some beautiful shots, and I really have to credit him with a lot of the episode's tone."

Frank's Halloween journey is as much through his memories as it is through the streets of his neighborhood. At one point, he recalls his Halloween encounter at age six with the neighborhood recluse, Mr. Crocell (Dean Cain). Crocell is a World War II vet suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, but all Frank and his friends know is that he is a figure of fear to them. Crocell had killed himself, but he now reappears as a ghost to challenge Frank to give up his fight against evil, because he can't beat the devil. "Frank's journey is similar to

Lara's," Morgan commented. "That's where Frank could go, where he could quit and find a place for himself. He is at the brink—he goes back to his yellow house and throws eggs at it, like kids do at Halloween. He was on the brink of becoming Mr. Crocell. But he's got to go back and clean up the mess; otherwise, he would just be giving up. What I liked is that it did seem like a slip-up in his quest."

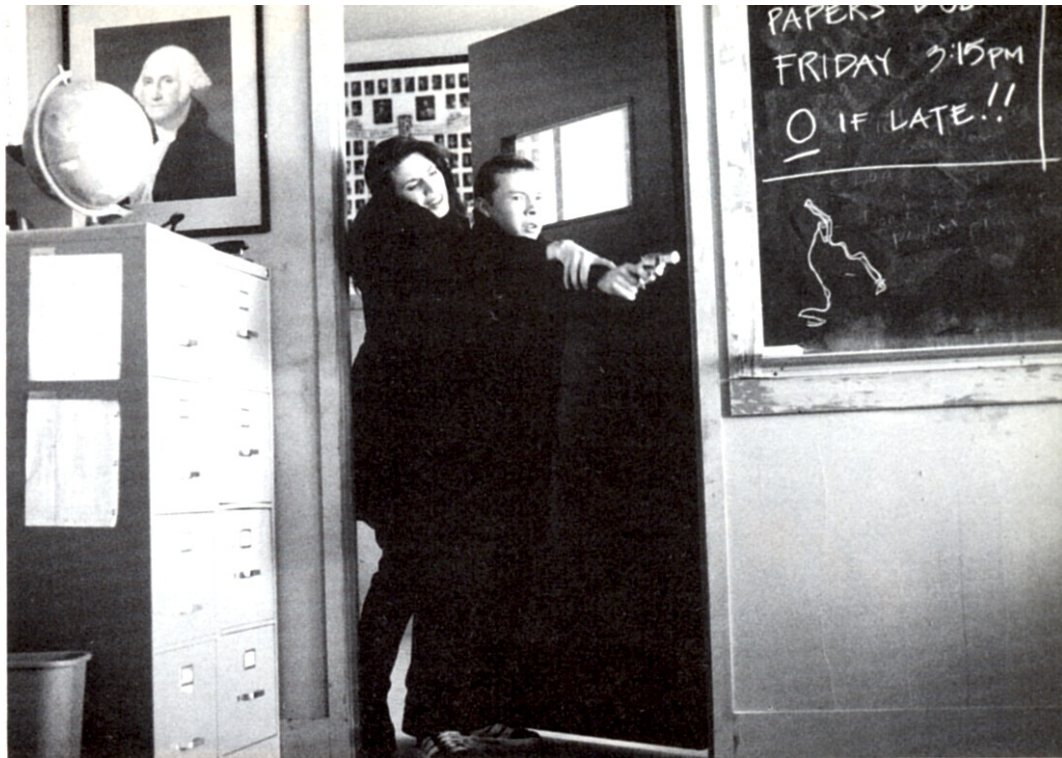
The episodes by Erin Maher and Kay Reindl also highlighted Frank's development. Their first episode, "A Single Blade of Grass," sent Frank to New York City to investigate a death at a New York City construction site that employed a Native Amer-

In "The Mikado," Frank (Lance Henriksen), Peter (Terry O'Quinn) and Roedecker (Allan Zinyk) try to track down a serial killer who has displayed his murder life on the Internet.



“You really see Catherine opening up more. In this episode, she has great strength. We really wanted to bring that out.”

—Writer Kay Reindl—



“Amanesis” finally showcased the often underused Catherine Black (left), played by Megan Gallagher.

was close enough that it was jettisoned. At that point, Morgan gave new instructions about the episode: while he didn’t want a scene that close to “The Curse of Frank Black,” he wanted the Christmas episode to be similar in that it would be a day in the life of Frank Black, rather than have Frank investigating a case. “It was Frank being guided along some kind of spiritual journey,” said Maher. “Since it was a Christmas episode, we wanted to deal with Frank’s family. It was a good opportunity to show some of his past with his father. Originally we had talked about Johnny Cash as Frank’s dad, but then he got sick. And then of course we were very jazzed to get Darren McGavin. The Night Stalker as Frank’s father! It was so perfect. We could not have asked for a better performance.

“We were thinking about Frank’s visions, and we thought if one of his parents had visions, that would mean something, since Frank’s daughter Jordan has them,” Maher added. “It’s something that’s passed from generation. So we decided that his mother would have visions too, mainly because last year in ‘Sacrament,’ the episode with Frank’s brother, we got a very strong impression that Frank and his father weren’t very close and his father was very remote and very strict. We were wondering why that was. And Frank and his brother never talked about their mother. So we came up with the idea of Frank’s mother dying when he was six years old, and he didn’t really understand how deep his father’s love was, so he blamed his father for letting her die alone. We also thought about the idea that Christmas is always supposed to be this perfect family holiday, but Frank’s family has split up—he’s without his wife and his child. He really doesn’t have a good relationship with his dad. It’s sort of the Christmas that you end up with, rather than the Christmas you really want.” This time, Reindl noted, by reconciling with his father and enjoying with Catherine a Christmas pageant in which daughter Jordan appeared, Frank finally got the Christmas that he wanted.

Maher and Reindl also wrote the one episode this season, “Anamnesis,” in which Frank did not appear. Instead, Catherine Black and Lara Means team up to investigate the strange behavior of a group of high school girls. One of the girls, Clare (Genele

Templeton), claims to have seen Mary. Lara and Catherine both come to the case as psychologists, and in their discussions with the girls, eventually realize that the Mary of Clare’s visions isn’t the Virgin Mary but Mary Magdalene.

Maher and Reindl became thoroughly fascinated with Mary Magdalene while researching the early years of Christianity. “We thought, ‘Wow, she rocks,’” laughed Reindl. They were surprised by what they learned, that Mary, although portrayed for nearly two centuries as a prostitute, was more likely a woman of good family and reputation. “She’s the apostle to the apostles. She’s the one who really understands what Christ is saying,” Maher said. “She was pretty much weeded out of the Bible. Women can’t be in any position of power, but when you look back at the history there were early Christian women who were priestesses. What happened to them? Why was that so threatening? We wanted to play with that a little bit.”

The episode questioned the purity of Jesus, a divergent view of Christ that Maher and Reindl had also come upon in their research. Network Standards and Practices objected, and the two writers spent many hours on the phone trying to explain their position. “They suddenly realized what the episode was about, and they were horrified,” Maher said, “because we were implying that since Jesus was Jewish and a rabbi, he probably was married and had children. Standards said, ‘You’re implying that Jesus had sex!’ And we’re going, ‘Yep!’”

The two writers enjoyed playing the rational Catherine off against the visionary Lara, who senses the breakdown that awaits her. “We got to do a little Mulder and Scully thing with them, because Lara is the spiritual one and Catherine is more scientific,”

Maher noted. “But in this episode you really see Catherine opening up a little bit more to the possibilities.” Added Reindl, “She has a really great strength in this episode. I think that one of the things she learns is that although she’s very protective of her family, she’s not protecting out of fear but out of strength, and she can do that for Frank and Jordan. Nobody is going to mess with those two when she’s around, and that’s what we really wanted to bring out in this episode.”

Another episode that traced Frank’s growth as well as his relationship with the Millennium Group was “Luminary,” written by Chip Johannessen. Frank defies Millennium Group orders and searches for a young man lost in the Alaskan wilderness who may have already died from exposure. “I wanted to write a story where Frank chose to stand up to the Millennium Group and do something he felt was personally important, based just on his instinct and his vision.” Johannessen said. “Although the Millennium Group was clearly pleased with him in the end, it wasn’t a task they set for him. And yet it was the right thing for him to do, and they were wise enough to see that. I wanted Frank to get out in the woods, having followed his inner voices, and have this moment where he realizes that the kid is dead and that he had been completely wrong to go on the search. It should be one of those moments in your life where you just feel lost. And then, he’d realize the kid was still alive and that he was called there for a reason.”

Although serial killer plots were downplayed this year, one of the season’s best episodes, “The Mikado,” centers around a particularly baffling serial killer who calls himself Avatar. Writer Michael Perry based Avatar on the Zodiac serial killer who had plagued the San Francisco area in the



In "The Time Is Now," Frank undertakes a dangerous investigation of the Millennium Group.

“We didn’t find a new audience. People who decided it wasn’t for them, didn’t come back this season to see how the show changed.”

—*Producer James Wong*—

interesting to get Peter excited about something that was not sanctioned by the Group and to show that he will do something like that. Terry is such a great actor, and we thought he deserved something to do instead of just saying, ‘That’s right, Frank...’ You’re right again, Frank.’ I thought, ‘What’s a great way to divide the group?’ I thought about doing a spy kind of show. I was doing research on the Knights of Templar and the Masons, and it seems like all those groups had other groups who were against them and betrayed them. There was so much intrigue. I realized that is how groups act and I thought, why shouldn’t the Millennium Group have the same thing?”

The two-parter “Owls” and “Roosters,” revealed a new level of conflict among the Millennium Group, when an artifact believed to be part of the True Cross is stolen. One faction, the Roosters, believes it was taken by another faction, the Owls, to weaken the Roosters. Morgan said that “Owls” and “Roosters” grew directly out of “The Hand of St. Sebastian,” an episode he had loved. “It’s nice to be so influenced by something your partner did,” he said. “I wanted to break the split we saw in that episode into a secular one. How can you make people believe that the end of the world is in sight? I tried to look to a scientific possibility. In the two-parter at the end of the season, I tried to tie those together with a plague. I started reading about germ warfare and thought, ‘Here are scientific events occurring in our world, and they’re predicted theologically.’”

The season’s two-part finale, “The Fourth Horseman” and “The Time is Come,” showed the outbreak of a plague which builds on the divisions within the Millennium Group and Frank’s growing distrust. He is tempted by an offer to join a rival investigatory group called The Trust. Meanwhile, he and Peter investigate the outbreak of a deadly plague, while Lara, who has been initiated into the Millennium Group’s secret knowledge, begins her final descent into madness. At the end, the Blacks have taken refuge in the remote cabin of Frank’s late father, where a sick and probably dying Catherine sneaks off into the woods so that already inoculated Frank can use their one vial of plague vaccine on

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1970s. Like Zodiac, Avatar sends cryptograms and coded messages to the police, wears an executioner’s hood and robe and, also like Zodiac, is never caught. He comes to the attention of the police and the Millennium Group when he displays his victim on a camera hooked up to a website and slays her in full view of thousands of people. Before Avatar cuts the on-line connection, a teenage boy manages to print the frame, and brings it to the police.

“I wanted a crime that no police department would have jurisdiction over,” Perry explained. “Who’s going to go after it? Ordinarily, if there’s a murder down the street, the city is going to take care of it. That’s how our entire society has been built. With a murder that isn’t tied to a physical place, this guy can go on forever, unless there’s a Millennium Group. That was the sport of it. It also has a great beginning for a mystery. It’s articulated by Frank, who says, ‘We don’t know who the victim is; we don’t know where the crime took place. We don’t have any crime scene. We don’t have any evidence except for a blurry print-out.’ That’s such a tantalizing beginning.”

With the location of Avatar’s set-up unknown, Frank is unable to connect physically with the evidence of the scene, a concept that Perry enjoyed. “Avatar cut Frank off from what he naturally does; this also has to do with the demonizing elements of the internet. It’s both a character and a thematic element, because 4,000 people per hour are logging on, hoping to see this girl die. The dehumanizing aspects of mediated communication, the internet in this particular case, are a sub-theme, and it ties in to how Frank, being cut off from being in a real place, can’t do what he normally does. That was a fun thing to play around with, and it works for both plot and character.”

“The Mikado” also marked the last appearance of Roedecker, a character Perry had loved from the beginning. “Frank and his colleague Peter Watts are accustomed to dealing with the macabre, so as a viewer you think they’re much cooler than you are. They don’t have to flinch; they’re tough guys. What I like about Roedecker in this episode is that he becomes an advocate for the audience. Roedecker is able to express the revulsion, the tears, that Frank has to constantly hold back. For the first time, Roedecker has a chance to see this is what Frank and Peter do all the time. It makes Frank seem grander because, if nobody in an episode reacts to the gruesome and macabre things that are around, they don’t seem so terrifying.”

MILLENNIUM mythology—the development of Frank’s relationship with the Millennium Group and revelations about the group’s mission—also took up a number of episodes, particularly “The Hand of St. Sebastian,” and two two-parters, “Owls” and “Roosters,” and “The Fourth Horseman” and “The Time is Now.”

In “The Hand of St. Sebastian,” Peter Watts calls upon Frank to help him on an unauthorized mission that brings them to Germany to retrieve the long-lost, recently recovered, mummified hand of St. Sebastian. They soon realize that someone is working against them, and the traitor turns out to be Millennium Group pathologist Cheryl Andrews (CCH Pounder). Wong, who wrote the script, wanted to write a Watts-driven episode, which would showcase O’Quinn and develop the Millennium Group. “I felt that by revealing that the Millennium Group had existed for centuries and setting the episode overseas, that would give the story greater scope and weight,” Wong said. “I also thought it would be in-

MILLENNIUM

DARIN MORGAN

X-FILES' court jester goes from outer space to doomsday comedy.

By Paula Vitaris

With "Humbug," "Jose Chung's 'From Outer Space,'" and the Emmy-winning "Clyde Bruckman's Final Repose," Darin Morgan proved not only that it is possible to write comedic episodes of THE X-FILES but also that today's audiences still appreciate character-based humor and sly physical gags inspired by his love for the silent comedians and sound-era directors such as Preston Sturges. When he signed on as a consulting producer for the second season of MILLENNIUM and also agreed to write and direct two episodes, he found it more of a challenge to apply his comic sensibilities. As a writer with an admitted weakness with plotting, he found the difficulties with MILLENNIUM arose not so much from dealing with its grim tone but from its structure. "THE X-FILES always has paranormal things," Morgan said. "The paranormal allowed you an out at the end. You could always go, 'And then, another weird thing happens, and you don't know what the hell happened,' and the show is over. You can't necessarily do that with MILLENNIUM because it is more grounded in real stuff. Without having that weirdness angle, you must become much more tangible."

Morgan's solution was to approach the show not from the main characters' points of view but from that of the guest characters: his first episode, "Jose Chung's Doomsday Defense," brought back the character from his X-FILES episode "Jose Chung's 'From Outer Space,'" his second episode, "Somehow, Satan Got Behind Me," related its events as flashbacks told by four demons discussing their experiences with humanity.

"In THE X-FILES," Morgan said, "Mulder and Scully were very delineated, at least at the beginning: Mulder believes; Scully doesn't—and you could always fall back on that. During MILLENNIUM's first season, you really don't know what

Frank Black was doing. Glen and Jim tried to make it more clear the second season, but it was never very clear what he is or what he believes in. That's one of the reasons why I avoided his point of view. The Jose Chung episode was actually about Frank Black, but it wasn't from his point of view."

Chung, portrayed by Charles Nelson Reilly, had been one of the most popular guest characters on X-FILES. In the MILLENNIUM episode, he is researching a book on self-help groups and the Millennium. When one of his contacts is murdered, he shows up at the investigation, and Frank Black (Lance Henriksen) reluctantly agrees to let Chung chronicle the investigation. Chung tags along as more murders are committed and Frank and Peter Watts (Terry O'Quinn) search for the killer, who at first appears to be a member of a group practicing something called "Selfosophy."

The episode, Morgan said, was written in reaction to media criticism about the lack of humor in the show. "I think there were a lot of problems with the first season, but I don't agree it was because the show was too dark," Morgan commented. "I just don't think it was very good. The critics needed something to latch on to, so the point I was making in 'Jose Chung's Doomsday Defense' was that it wasn't the darkness that was wrong with the show. If someone had

Morgan reused his well-liked guest character from THE X-FILES, Jose Chung (Charles Nelson Reilly), in "Jose Chung's Doomsday Defense."



Darin Morgan had four demons get together in a donut shop to share their experiences with each other in "Somehow, Satan Got Behind Me."

said, 'The stories aren't interesting enough,' I would have agreed. But I had problems with vague generalizations that really aren't true."

To answer the critics' misperceptions, Morgan had Lance Henriksen appear in one scene as detective Rocket McGrane, the hero of a series of hard-boiled pulp novels written by J. Onan Goopta, the founder of Selfosophy. Frank Black is reading one of the novels, when a dissolve takes us into the book itself. Henriksen, sporting a high blond wig and emblematic trench coat, plays McGrane as so relentlessly cheerful, hyper and self-important that you could cheerfully strangle him. "I wanted to give Lance something to do," Morgan said. "And because the critics kept saying, 'We don't want this dark depressive guy,' I wanted to show them how stupid they were. I thought they were not aware of what they wanted, but once they saw it, they would go, 'I'm an idiot.'"

Though Morgan's target with Selfosophy would appear to be Scientology, his actual intent was to spoof the self-help movement, personified by such relentless promoters as Tony Robbins. The script casts a sharp, mocking eye on what Morgan called "self-help positivism" and the people "who tell you think positive and everything will be fine." One scene in particular was a response to both the self-help movement and to the critics who thought Frank should be more upbeat. Frank tries out the Selfosophist device meant to erase bad thoughts. When asked



In "Jose Chung's Doomsday Defense" Morgan had Henriksen briefly appear as a light-hearted pulp novel detective—a satirical jab at critics who complained that MILLENNIUM's characters lacked humor.

“Frank was seeing the devil, and I thought it would be interesting to see the reverse of that. If the devils saw Frank, what would they say?”

—Writer-director Darin Morgan—

Morgan came up with four demons, named Abum (Dick Bakalyan), Blurk (Bill Macy), Greb (Alex Diakun) and Toby (Wally Dalton), who like to gather at a donut shop and relate what they have done lately to corrupt humanity. The four appear to everyone as normal men, but in reality they look and act like mild-mannered relatives of Tim Curry's Darkness from LEGEND. Munching on apple fritters and drinking coffee, they each tell a tale in flashback. Blurk encouraged a young man to commit a series of killings in imitation of his hero, an executed serial killer. Abum observed a man so bored by his humdrum life that he jumps out the window with as little enthusiasm as he did everything else. Greb turns himself into a dancing devil-baby and torments a TV network censor into murderous insanity. Toby had a love affair with an aging stripper (Gabrielle Rose, seen in Atom Egoyan's THE SWEET HEREAFTER), who committed suicide when he broke up with her. Each story has one thing in common that puzzles the demons: they have each observed a depressed-looking man who seems to see their "true essence." It is, of course, Frank Black.

Frank has seen devils since the inception of the show, but Morgan's fascination with the image arose from a second-season episode, "The Curse of Frank Black," in which Frank, while escorting his daughter Jordan trick or treating, experiences a number of disturbing sightings of a demon who seems to be watching him. "I thought the Halloween show was one of MILLENNIUM's best," Morgan said. "When I saw the devil in the episode with his hands folded or tapping, I immediately thought, *That's what the show needs!* Frank was seeing the devil, and I thought it would be interesting to see the reverse of that. If the devils saw Frank, what would they be saying about him?" Morgan was also intrigued with the idea of putting the devils in a commonplace setting such as the donut shop that serves as their hang-out. "That's interesting to me, rather than seeing them in visions drinking blood or something like that, which would normally be the case."

Morgan didn't set out to create four separate stories, but he couldn't work out a plot and the deadline was looming. He decided it would be easier to write an anthology-

to think of something bad, he is bombarded by a barrage of terrifying images from past cases. "These self-help techniques—which are really not more advanced than what you see in the episode—ask you to imagine something you don't like, then visualize another object to push the bad thoughts away," Morgan explained. "That may work for some minor thing in your life, but to think that someone whose job requires them to see death on a daily basis could use these simplistic techniques to make everything fine, is ludicrous. So I was making fun of that attitude and also of the critics who think that you can have a character like Frank Black be more light-hearted when the topics he's dealing with are very depressing."

Morgan enjoyed working again with the ebullient Reilly, who had become a favorite with the cast and crew while filming "Jose Chung's 'From Outer Space.'" "I saw how much fun he was to work with, and I figured that since my first time directing was going to be nerve-wracking enough, I needed someone there to make it enjoyable," said Morgan. Reilly is a respected theater director as well as an actor, and Morgan found him to be an intuitive performer. "Charles is very easy to direct," he said. "We'd do a take, and I'd go, 'How about a little bit bigger?' He would simply go, 'You want an eight, and I gave you a six.' And I'd say, 'Yeah.' We didn't have to get into talking about motivation or anything like that, because that's all quite understood."

The episode's satire did not escape the notice of the Church of Scientology, which is not known for tolerating what it regards as attacks. Some of the episode's references clearly spoofed Scientology practices, and when Church officials read a copy of the script, they complained to Fox. Glen Morgan and James Wong spent several hours at

the Scientology Celebrity Center in Los Angeles, trying to iron out differences. Darin made a number of rewrites and changes including renaming his fictional group from "Selftologists" to "Selfosophists." Morgan was purposefully vague in discussing the experience, but he said he wrote his feelings about it into some of Jose Chung's dialogue, such as: "Look, you can believe whatever you want to believe in, and if it helps you, more power to you.... if I should think you're a bunch of idiots, that should be my right to say so."

"It seemed like a very simple freedom of speech issue," Morgan added. "You take free speech for granted until certain people are threatening you, whether it be legally or otherwise, to shut up. And it isn't until that happens that you go, 'How much am I willing to stand up for this?'"

Morgan killed off Chung at the end of "Jose Chung's Doomsday Defense." Why kill off such a delightful character? "To make sure nobody else uses him!" Morgan laughed. "My agent suggested that I do one episode on every show on TV and take Jose Chung with me—do a Jose Chung episode for ER and things like that. Actually, I figured people wouldn't think that I would kill him off—so I did. It was a similar dilemma to THE X-FILES. I was trying to do a lighter MILLENNIUM, and I wanted to show that you can do that kind of lightness but still have the rather depressing overtones. So you kill off your lead guy. The show ends on a joke, though, when Chung says before he dies that the meaning of the MILLENNIUM is "a thousand more years of the same old crap."

Morgan's second episode, "Somehow, Satan Got Behind Me," was something of a departure, both for the show and for the writer. It consisted of an anthology of four one-act stories, each narrated by a demon.



"Somehow, Satan Got Behind Me": four demons gather in a donut shop. Above: the demonic quartet appear as ordinary old men to the other customers.

style episode, rather than finish the elusive hour-long story. "I liked it a lot," Morgan said, referring to the four-story structure. "I needed help from Glen. He actually wrote the first draft of the third act, the one about the TV censor. I had to rewrite it to make it 'my voice,' or I would have had trouble directing it. I was really late with this script. I was writing it as I was prepping, which made it really, really difficult, but if it hadn't had separate acts, it would have killed me. Having those small chunks was very helpful, and I actually enjoyed it a lot. That's what I like about the episode, that each act is very different from the previous one. The curious thing was that after the show aired, I had people name their favorite devil, thinking I would agree with them or that would be the obvious choice. It was like a personality test to see what devil they thought was the best."

The most outrageous story was the third act with the TV censor (Richard Steinmetz, who also played Selfologist "Mr. Smooth" in "Jose Chung's Doomsday Defense") on the verge of a nervous breakdown, thanks



to his "hallucination" of the devil baby. The script was loaded with in-jokes, including the censor's hysterical disapproval of an X-FILES script and his subsequent assault on what looks to be the set of THE X-FILES. In one scene, thanks to Greb's demonic influences, the censor sees parking signs with forbidden words and phrases. The Fox Standards and Practices people enjoyed the job at their profession, Morgan said, adding that they requested only one change. Glen Morgan's first draft used the acronym ANT (American Network Television) for the censor's employer. Darin's rewrite changed ANT to FUX. "They said no to that," Morgan said. "So I had to go back to ANT. I think the censors got a big kick out of it. And they were in a position where if they

tried to say no to it, they knew how silly they'd be, because they'd be doing what the show was making fun of."

The fourth act was a change of pace for Morgan, a love story between the devil Toby and the aging stripper named Sally he picks up at a strip bar which serves as a recurring locale in three of the four acts. While not entirely free of humorous moments, the act's tone is overall a serious and melancholy one. For a brief time, the relationship brings happiness to the lonely Sally, although in one astonishing sequence, we learn that she recognizes Toby for who he is but chooses to remain with him.

Actor Wally Dalton "had that leading man-sadness type of quality Toby required," Morgan commented. "I was actually going to try to cast younger, but I thought he was really good for the part and he worked out great."

After Sally commits suicide, Frank arrives as part of the forensics team. He spots a weeping Toby by her side and instantly recognizes his true nature. "You must be so lonely," Frank tells him acidly. Is Toby truly grieving or not? "That's an intentional ambiguity," Morgan said. "First you're supposed to think he's falling in love with this woman. Then you're supposed to think he was just out to get her soul. At the end you're supposed to think that he really did love her. Wally was a writer himself [on BARNEY MILLER and other shows], and he understood what I was doing. It was really nice working with a writer."

With the end of MILLENNIUM's second season, Morgan left the show to work at home on his own original material. His episodes, so different from other MILLENNIUM episodes, drew a divided, "love-it-or-hate-it" reaction from the audience. "I've come to expect it," he commented. "That doesn't bother me." □

Darin Morgan directs one of the demons in "Somehow, Satan Got Behind Me."





Producer Chris Carter (inset) tried to re-energize the fifth season by hiring renowned outside writers such as William Gibson, who penned "Kill Switch," in which Mulder and Scully's investigation (top) leads to Mulder's entrapment in a virtual reality world (bottom).

X-FILES

A mixed bag of episodes and a feature film pave the way for Season Six.

The 1997-98 season started off well for THE X-FILES. Nominated once again for an Emmy for outstanding drama series, the show lost to LAW AND ORDER, but lead actress Gillian Anderson picked up her second Emmy as outstanding actress in a drama series (co-star David Duchovny, also nominated, lost). Later in the season, THE X-FILES won yet another Golden Globe for Best Drama Series (both Duchovny and Anderson, who had won last year in their respective categories, came away empty-handed).

The start date for shooting the series in Vancouver was pushed back a month to mid-August, since Duchovny and Anderson were occupied in Los Angeles filming the X-FILES feature film, and the series finally broadcast its fifth season premiere on November 2, 1997. The show had moved from its Friday time slot to 9:00 p.m. on Sundays during season four, and despite competition with movies on the other networks, Sunday continued to be a winner. THE X-FILES regularly retained its slot in the top 20 during the season, although ratings began to slip during the spring.

The writing-producing staff consisted of four familiar names—Chris Carter, Frank Spotnitz, John Shiban and Vince Gilligan—as well as six new writers: Tim Minear (LOIS AND CLARK), Mark Saraceni, and two writing teams, Dan Angel and Billy Brown, and Jessica Scott and Mike Wollaeger. Carter brought in three big-name guest writers this year. Stephen King's script, "Chinga," was rewritten by Carter, who received credit this time; and science fiction authors William Gibson and Tom Maddox contributed one of the year's best, "Kill Switch."

The new writers had a hard time fitting in. By mid-season, none of their scripts had



Kim Manners directs David Duchovny in the fifth season episode, "Patient X."

been produced, and shortly before the Christmas hiatus, Spotnitz, who was in charge of the writing staff, fired Saraceni, Brown, Angel, Scott and Wollaeger. Minear exited at the end of the year. Brown and Angel's script, "All Souls," was rewritten by Spotnitz and Shiban, who received credit for the teleplay, while Brown and Angel received a "story by" credit. Scott and Wollaeger's script for "Schizogeny" was substantially rewritten by an uncredited Carter.

There were problems with the stars, too. Duchovny made it clear he wanted the show moved to Los Angeles for its sixth season, making it easier for him to find movie work during hiatus and to be near his new wife, actress Tea Leoni (DEEP IMPACT). Anderson quietly supported the move. Carter opposed the move, and eventually Fox officials stepped in and made the decision. The show would move to Los Angeles, and filming for the 1998-99 season began in July on the Fox lot in Century City.

Besides the move, the big news for the

X-FILES universe was the opening of the feature film. Could the show translate into a big screen franchise? The feature, shot in Los Angeles during the 1997 hiatus on a budget of \$62 million, opened on June 19 in the wake of a massive publicity campaign. Reviews varied from excellent (*Newsweek* put Duchovny and Anderson on its cover and called the feature a "smart, scary movie") to withering, although most were mixed. The opening weekend boxoffice (\$31 million) was substantial, although not the \$40 million Fox had been hoping for. The picture was bleaker the second weekend, when it took in only \$13.3 million, a drastic 56% drop. However, once overseas sales and merchandise are counted, the X-FILES movie will eventually be in the black, and a second feature film is not an impossibility. What fans can count on for now is a sixth season consisting of 22 episodes, and the likelihood of a seventh season, if Duchovny and Anderson manage to stick it out for yet another year. □

BY PAULA
VITARIS

X-FILES

DIVISION CHIEF BLEVINS

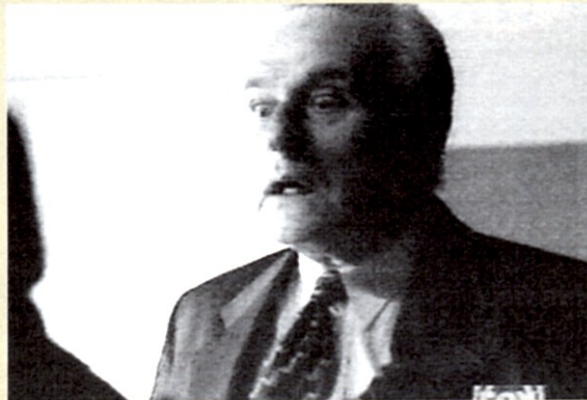
Actor Charles Cioffi on his character's demise.

By David Hughes

"Ain't that fun?" thunders a deep New York Italian accent, as 62-year-old actor Charles Cioffi (pronounced "Choffee") chuckles about the apparent demise of his character, Division Chief Scott Blevins, in "Redux II," the one hundredth episode of THE X-FILES. Those who have followed the show since the pilot episode will remember Blevins as the FBI Division Chief—sometimes erroneously referred to as "Section Chief," though the nameplate on his desk and door clearly state his correct title—who assigns Special Agent Scully to work with the maverick Mulder on the unsolved FBI cases known unofficially as the "X" Files. Initially, Blevins kept a close eye on the new partnership's activities, with Scully reporting her observations about Mulder's methods back to her superior. But the silent, smoking presence in Blevins' office in those early episodes slowly took over as the series' principal malignant force, and Blevins receded into the background...

...Until nearly four years later, when he reappeared, listening patiently to an older, wiser Scully as she detailed the illegitimacy of Mulder's investigations—and reported his apparent suicide. By the end of the three-part story arc, Blevins has been lied to, threatened, implicated in a government-wide conspiracy, accused of accepting illegal payments from a biological research group—and, finally, shot in cold blood by his right hand man. No wonder Cioffi is chuckling. "Yes, they never really included him that much in the storyline since the beginning of the show," he said. "When we did the pilot and the first two episodes, he was more involved—recruiting [Scully], questioning her and things like that. For four years, he just dropped out of the picture, and then came back in at the end to wrap up this particular storyline. They seemed to want to say, 'Okay, this was the first four years, and now we want to be off doing something else.'"

Unfortunately, the execution of Blevins



FBI Division Chief Blevins (Charles Cioffi), who assigned Scully to the X-Files in the pilot episode, was apparently assassinated in this year's "Redux II." Guess what? He might not really be dead.

came at precisely the point when he had begun to get really interesting. "They got him away from the sitting behind a desk and feeding lines to Gillian," said Cioffi. "They had set up Blevins as being a villain, but if you look at the last episode, you'll see that he may not necessarily have been a villain—he may have been a pawn. In the episode, you see [that] the big heavy man [1st Elder] giving orders to the Cigarette Smoking Man wants to get rid of all these people for his own nefarious reasons, and then we see the 1st Agent—the part that Ken Camroux played—sitting at my desk, talking on my telephone, and shooting me. And you realize that, no, it's not Blevins; it's the 1st Agent who has been the bad guy all along," he theorized, referring to the mysterious higher-up who appeared in Blevins' office in the pilot episode, and returned almost two full seasons later in "Anasazi." He continued, "You see the panic on Blevins' face and realize that maybe Blevins was not the guy who was in charge of this whole thing; he was not the leak on the inside. Skinner does say that he was on the take from the Roush corporation," he concedes, "but then they could have doctored the books. Or maybe he was kept a hostage for some reason; maybe they had some hanky panky like J. Edgar Hoover stuff on him in order to keep him quiet."

Of course, everyone had their opinions about the climactic events of the "Gethse-

mane"/"Redux"/"Redux II" three-hander, and Cioffi is no exception. "They dangled too many carrots in front of the audience," he stated unequivocally. "This is not like a French Opera, where you wrap everything up with a pink ribbon at the end. No—they have to carry on and carry out some of those storylines. I mean, that was such an emotional thing, that for four years we have been confronted, almost every episode, with this [subplot] about Mulder's sister. And then to actually [have him] confront his sister and have the Cigarette Smoking Man as her foster father, and she doesn't want to see her real mother?" He whistles appreciatively. "That's an awful lot of stuff, you know." He laughed. "And then the whole business with Scully's family...Does that get extended into the future with Mulder and Skinner? And what does that really mean?" Cioffi evidently relishes untangling the convoluted storyline, having followed the show himself as a viewer since his own appearance in the pilot, but, he says, spare me the soap opera. "I hope they don't go spinning off into something that's saccharin and maudlin. Just give me the facts—don't play me the violin."

"If you look at 'Redux,'" he added, "there was an awful lot of re-introducing people and sitting behind desks and walking down corridors, and the dialogue I remember as being especially difficult because it was so stilted. Everything was exposition, so you're continually telling a story, but you don't show anybody anything—it's like an hour-long narration. And then finally, in the last episode, everything happens: two people get shot, and Scully almost dies, and she comes back, and Mulder meets his sister and—Holy Jesus! How can they keep this up? Well, they can't keep this up, but they're gonna end it and try to move on in another direction."

Having worked on the first three episodes, and three on the cusp of the fourth and fifth seasons, Cioffi is perhaps in a unique position to comment on the changes behind the scenes from season one

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FIFTH SEASON EPISODE GUIDE

By Paula Vitaris

"There's a dead man on the floor in my apartment and it's only a matter of time before he begins to stink the place up."
—Mulder

REDUX

11/2/97. Editor: Heather MacDougall. Written by Chris Carter. Directed by R.W. Goodwin.

"Redux" repeats the events of last season's finale "Gethsemane," filling in the gaps that led to the episode's cliffhanger. It's like a prime-time version of an old movie serial that ended on a cliffhanger each week. In "Redux," we learn that Mulder and Scully are in cahoots together to deceive the Consortium and smoke out its mole in the FBI (Scully suspects Skinner). Skinner knows from the autopsy report that the body in Mulder's apartment is not Mulder's. He is furious with Scully for lying about the identity of the dead man, a government operative named Scott Ostelhoff who was killed in a shoot-out with Mulder when Mulder discovered him spying on his apartment from the apartment above. While Scully stalls the FBI inquiry, Mulder takes Ostelhoff's I.D. card and uses it to enter a Department of Defense complex, where he bumps into Michael Kritschgau (John Finn), the DOD employee who told him in "Gethsemane" that the existence of aliens was a government hoax. Kritschgau reiterates to Mulder that the government and the military concocted all the stories about aliens to hide the truth about massive Cold War weapons build-ups. Mulder then uses his fake ID to enter a secret area, where he discovers dozens upon dozens of "alien" bodies (presumably the fake aliens described by Kritschgau in "Gethsemane") and dozens of sleeping pregnant women. He also penetrates the Pentagon archive where he locates Scully's file and retrieves a tube with a liquid he hopes will cure Scully's cancer; it turns out to be merely de-ionized water. Scully also learns that her DNA matches DNA taken from the ice core samples retrieved in "Gethsemane." Further evidence, she believes, that her cancer was manufactured by humans, not aliens. The end of "Redux" catches up with the end of "Gethsemane": Scully "denounces" Mulder's work and collapses.

"Redux" is all plot, plot, plot. Much of the plot is unbelievable. Why is Mulder surprised someone is eavesdropping on him? This is not the first time his apartment has been bugged. Why would someone spying on Mulder possess phone records leading back to the FBI? Is someone trying to frame Skinner? If so, it's not borne out in the episode. Mulder enters secret DOD levels with incredible ease, although it makes no sense that a

The Cancer Man is apparently assassinated at the end of "Redux II." Guess what (stop me if you've heard this one): he isn't really dead.



"Redux" resolved the fourth season cliffhanger "Gethsemane." Guess what? Mulder didn't really kill himself after all. Surprised? We thought not.

low-level operative like Ostelhoff would have access to these areas. Scully has inexplicably become an expert in DNA testing as well as pathology, and just as inexplicably, all the equipment she needs is located at a paleoclimatology lab. The episode drags, too, with endless voiceovers from Mulder and Scully that function as a "Redux"-within-a-"Redux": just as "Redux" explains "Gethsemane," the voiceovers explain "Redux." They're convenient shorthand for characterization and motivation but end up sucking the energy out of the episode. Kritschgau's monologue on the government's alien hoax, accompanied by shot after shot drawn from documentary footage, is insufferable. There's also the question of the believability of Kritschgau's story, but Mulder seems to buy it.

There is one truly galvanizing scene, and that's the confrontation between Scully and Skinner after he follows her to the lab where she is performing her DNA test. The suspicions, the accusations, the withholding of information, the decision to trust, if only for a few more hours—suddenly, "Redux" springs to vibrant life, only to sink back into the narrative mud afterwards.

One also wonders about the choices Mulder and Scully make in this episode, both tactical and moral. Mulder's assault on Ostelhoff is extraordinarily foolish, ending, naturally, in disaster, when Ostelhoff grabs his weapon and Mulder's shoots him first. (Lucky for Mulder the neighbors don't hear anything, although they heard the shooting in the building back in "Anasazi.") Then there's the choice Mulder and Scully make to mutilate Ostelhoff's corpse, pass him off as Mulder and lie to Skinner and the FBI committee. They are taking a big step towards becoming the thing they are trying to fight, yet there is no hesitation on their part, no concern about what they are doing. The episode tells us that what they're doing is quite all right, that the ends do justify the means. It's a disturbing turnabout for a series—and two characters—that until now refused to take the easy way out.

"I saved your ass, Agent Mulder!"
—Skinner

REDUX II

11/9/97. Editor: Lynne Willingham. Written by Chris Carter. Directed by Kim Manners.

You can't help keep thinking of "One Breath" while watching "Redux II." The basic plot isn't all that different, but it's impossible to duplicate the magic of "One Breath." Of course, that doesn't stop the writers from trying. So once again, Scully is hospitalized and close to death, while Mulder, now officially alive, tries to maneuver through a web of lies and deceit to find a cure for Scully. But where everything in "One Breath" moved inexorably towards a heart-wrenching resolution, here it's paint-by-numbers. That almost mystical bond between them in "One Breath" is now diluted by a plot overstuffed with FBI hearings, the

possible return of Samantha, and Scully's turn not towards Mulder or even her own strength but to God. As the episode proceeds, Mulder tries to find out the truth about the mole in the FBI and Kritschgau's allegations about government cover-ups. He encounters the Cigarette Smoking Man, who tries to lure Mulder to his side by throwing him some very big carrots, including the information that the tube of de-ionized water holds precious cargo: a chip identical to the one removed from Scully's neck last season. Later on, the Smoking Man arranges a meeting between Mulder and a woman (Megan Leitch) Mulder takes to be Samantha. She tearfully relates what has happened since her abduction and how she has been cared for by her "father"—to Mulder's shock, the Cigarette Smoking Man. The next morning the Smoking Man offers Mulder a deal: quit the FBI and he'll show him the truth about aliens and everything he's ever been searching for, but Mulder refuses. At the next session of the FBI inquiry, Mulder names Section Chief Blevins as the mole (Blevins is assassinated within minutes). And a hit man shoots the Cigarette Smoking Man. While all this is going on, Scully has the new chip placed back in her neck, undergoes last-minute experimental chemotherapy and also prays with Father McCue (Arnie Walters) for salvation. The next day at the hospital Skinner tells Mulder the cancer is in remission, the Smoking Man's body has disappeared, and Blevins was on the payroll of a biotech company called Roush.



A moment of agony for Mulder in "Redux II," as he fears he will not be able to find the cure for Scully's advancing cancer.

It's all wrapped up neatly yet ambiguously. Mulder still has no evidence that Kritschgau's statements are true. Actually, he doesn't have anything anymore. At the end, he's exiled himself to the hospital corridor, alone and apart from Scully and her celebrating family. His quest has been taken from him, because he believes the woman he met was Samantha. While the diner scene is deeply affecting, thanks to the sensitive acting of Duchovny and Leitch, this plot development is a major misstep. It strips Mulder of his motivating force and leaves him empty, without purpose. There's something offensive, both to Mulder and Samantha, in passing off what should have been the climax of the show as a B-plot, just another twist in an episode full of twists. Shooting the Cigarette Smoking Man is a cheap ploy. He's obviously not dead, so why do it? As for Scully, it's a relief the cancer is in remission so the show can move beyond the melodramatics of this medical soap opera, in which Scully's cancer barely affects her until it's time for the expected moment of life or death. The prayer scene is sheer emotional manipulation. And just as the return of Samantha robs Mulder of his defining force, Scully's need to submit to powers outside herself the Consortium's chip, and yes, God—or face death, robs her of the qualities that made her most admirable, particularly as the rare female character on television with a mind of her own. If only Scully's quandaries had concerned her professional life, not her sinuses (or her ovaries).



What makes "Redux II" tolerable is Duchovny, who always hits the right notes of anger, despair, grief, relief, or emotional numbness. He is ably assisted by Pileggi's stern but supportive Skinner and Pat Skipper as Scully's over-protective brother.

"We at the FCC enjoy forging positive ties with the American public. It's our way of saying communication is just another way of sharing."
—Byers

UNUSUAL SUSPECTS

★★★

11/16/97. Editor: Lynne Willingham. Written by Vince Gilligan. Directed by Kim Manners.

"Unusual Suspects" is filler—but amusing filler, with some rather dire implications at the end for Mulder. Set in the past, it provides a convenient continuity break between the conspiracy arc of the previous three episodes and the present day stand-alone episodes to follow. The year is 1989. The location: a Baltimore computer and electronics show. Among the dealers are one Melvin Frohike (Tom Braidwood) and one Ringo Langly (Dean Haglund), apparently long-time rivals. The Federal Communications Commission has set up shop in a nearby booth manned by straight-arrow bureaucrat John Fitzgerald Byers (Bruce Harwood). Yes, these three are the Lone Gunmen, but before they were the Lone Gunmen. Byers spots a mysterious, cool, Hitchcockian blonde in distress (Signy Coleman) and is instantly smitten. Her name is Holly Modeski, she says, and she is searching for her daughter, who has been abducted by her "psychotic" ex-boyfriend. Byers agrees to help her, and soon, to his horror, he finds himself hacking into a secret Department of Defense computer database, downloading a file on the missing girl, and enlisting a quarreling Frohike and Langly to help him decode it. Then the boyfriend appears—but he turns out to be a young Agent Fox Mulder. According to Agent Mulder and the Justice Department, Byers' new crush is a former government chemist responsible for the deaths of several colleagues. After that, all hell breaks loose—the Department of Defense is on to the hack and takes away Byers' FCC colleague. Modeski (whose real first name is Suzanne, not Holly), claims she's been framed, then finds a listening device in her molar, which she removes with a pair of pliers. There's a shoot-out at a warehouse where unknown government forces have stored a paranoia-inducing gas that will be tested on an unknowing citizenry through asthma inhalers.

In one day, the world has turned upside down for the putative Lone Gunmen, who have had their eyes opened to governmental hidden agendas. The greatest change is in Byers, who had been a loyal public servant. Harwood is a delight as the naive Byers, registering expertly the shifts in Byers' world view with the arrival of each new bit of information. And Haglund and Braidwood make for good comic relief; they get the best lines. Haglund's Dungeons and Dragons scene is

Pursued by the virtually invisible predator in "Detour," agents Mulder and Scully spend a fearful night isolated in the woods.



In a crossover episode, HOMICIDE's Detective Munch (Richard Belzer) interrogates Bruce Harwood's Byers in "Unusual Suspects."

hilarious, especially at the end, when Langly orders Frohike to "say it" and Frohike is forced to admit that Langly has "the best kung fu." Signy Coleman is nicely mysterious as Modeski. The reappearance of a not-yet dead X (Steven Williams) at the warehouse is welcome, since Williams burns up the screen whenever he's in the shot and X was such a fascinating character. Best of all is a cameo appearance by Richard Belzer, reprising his HOMICIDE character, the cynical Detective Munch, who interrogates Byers in the episode's framing scenes. Duchovny seems to have fun as the younger Mulder, too. But what happens to Mulder is more than a little disturbing. Mulder is sprayed with the paranoia-inducing gas at the warehouse and believes he's seeing aliens—a hallucination most likely conjured up from his memory of a UFO exhibit at the convention. This doesn't exactly jibe with the oft-told story that hypnotic regression first unlocked his memories of Samantha's abduction. So was it gas or was it hypnosis? Mulder's belief in gas-induced hallucinations doesn't say much for his ability to think rationally.

"Unfortunately around this time of year I always develop this severe hemorrhoidal condition."
—Mulder

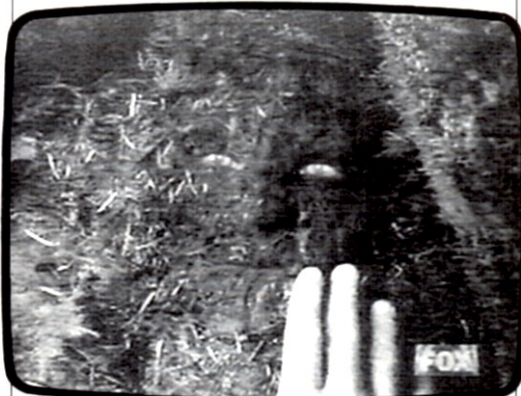
DETOUR

★★

11/23/97. Editor: Casey O Rohrs. Written by Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Brett Dowler.

Mulder and Scully are reluctantly on the way to a "Teamwork" communications seminar in Florida with another pair of FBI agents when the trip is interrupted by a roadblock. Several people have disappeared in the nearby woods, possibly the result of a wild animal attack. Mulder, seizing an excuse to escape the unwanted seminar, quickly involves himself in the case; evidence leads him to speculate that some kind of unknown forest creature is fighting back against encroaching development. He and Scully, along with search and rescue chief Michele Fazekas (Colleen Flynn) and tech-head Jeff Glaser (Anthony Rapp), search the woods using an infra-red device. They spot two figures, but after a chase, Michele and Jeff also disappear suddenly and Mulder is attacked and wounded. Mulder and Scully are stranded in the woods overnight. The next morning, Scully falls into the creatures' lair and discovers its victims, some dead, some on the verge of death. When she is attacked in the cave, she shoots one of the creatures, which turns out to be a manlike being formed out of a wood and leaf substance. The other FBI agents and police locate and rescue everyone. Mulder theorizes that the creatures may be the remnants of the company of Ponce de Leon, who came to Florida 400 years ago searching for the Fountain of Youth. Perhaps they've adapted so well they have become literally part of the woods and now are reacting to protect their home.

"Detour" is about communication—or, miscommunication; a deliberate detour on Mulder's part, to avoid serious talk. His discomfort concerning the communications seminar is nicely observed. Every time Scully attempts to connect with him, he deflects her, either by walking out when she brings him wine and cheese at the motel, or by wisecracking, when they're lost in the woods and she wants to talk about her near-death from cancer. These scenes don't resonate particularly deeply—the dialogue isn't revealing or profound. Scully's question to Mulder about whether he's ever thought about death is preposterous, considering how often they've been close to death over the past few years. And although Scully gets to bring up her cancer, Mulder is written as a blank; he seems utterly unaffected by the events of "Gethsemane," "Redux" and "Redux II." There's not even a clue that Mulder has told Scully about Samantha's return. Scully's singing to a wounded (and temporarily infantile) Mulder is a failed attempt to create "a special X-FILES moment," a poor substitute for meaningful dialogue between the two. There are no breakthroughs for Mulder and Scully, unless one counts their building together in the cave a "tower" of bodies—a grotesque version of the tower-building trust exercise described by one of the other FBI agents—as their own peculiar way of communicating.



The monsters in "Detour" are descendants of Spanish Conquistadors who have evolved the ability to camouflage themselves in the woods.

But where "Detour" really fails is as an X-File. Mulder's theories about the unseen predator are not a leap of genius thinking; they're so nonsensical that he comes off looking like an idiot. The investigation through the woods is strictly from Bad Television Writing 101. Here we have four people planning to spend hours in the woods without adequate preparation or equipment. Only Michele has substantial outdoor training, and she is the only one to bring survival gear (which means she doesn't know much about properly equipping a rescue team). So of course when she disappears, Mulder and Scully are stuck without water, food, fire, shelter, first aid or a radio. (At least they have their guns!) It's Mulder who has figured out that the forest creature's mode of attack is to divide and conquer its prey. But, oddly enough, as soon as he and the others locate two creatures via the infra-red, they divide up. Unfortunately, what could have been a wonderful PREDATOR-type episode, exploiting the most basic of stories, instead only skims the surface of humanity's responses to the primordial forest. Even the cinematography is flattened out to a dull wash of gray and green; the woods don't look mysterious or frightening at all—just wet.

Flynn is excellent as Michele Fazekas, and the brief appearance of RENT star Anthony Rapp as Jeff is most welcome. And even if the forest creature's glowing red eyes are bad camouflage, they make for a very creepy effect.



X-FILES

LONE GUNMEN

Exploring the origins of the conspiracy trio.

By Douglas Eby

The editors of the fictional magazine "The Lone Gunman"—a journal of conspiracy theories about the Kennedy assassination and various other government plots—were originally written for a one-time appearance on THE X-FILES, but when Chris Carter, Glen Morgan, and James Wong discovered the level of Internet enthusiasm for the characters, they had the trio of Langly (Dean Haglund), Frohike (Tom Braidwood) and Byers (Bruce Harwood) continue making regular appearances.

"Short, unshaven and clad in combat boots...the Frog Prince of the Lone Gunman editorial board"—that is from the description of Frohike on the official X-FILES website, which goes on to say, "From his first leering appearance in 'E.B.E.,' he has made no secret of his attraction to Agent Dana Scully. The photographic and surveillance specialist in the group, he

once loaned Mulder a pair of night-vision goggles only after extracting Scully's phone number from him. Yet he has shown a tender side as well, being the only person to bring Scully flowers when she lay dying." Braidwood noted that, this past season, the Lone Gunmen showed up a little more often than in previous ones. "It's sort of catch as catch can," he said. "It depends on what the requirements of the script are."

Regarding Frohike's relationship to Scully, Braidwood said it has "become more of a friendship than anything else. Not so much lecher-type thing, but ogling Scully. There's less of that now, because there's a familiarity and respect between the characters. And that extends to Mulder as well."

Described on the official website as "Sporting black-rimmed glasses, long blond hair and T-shirts from a dozen hard-rock bands, he is not the picture of a conventional conspirator"—Langly is also listed as



Though introduced as one-shot character, Frohike (Tom Braidwood), Langley (Dean Haglund) and Byers (Bruce Harwood) continue to grow in popularity.

the communications expert of the group, the one "most likely to joke with Mulder or invite him to 'hop on the Internet to nitpick the scientific inaccuracies' of a new science-fiction show. But he's also a little bent." Haglund, who plays Langly, noted that the episode "Unusual Suspects" was "a flashback to 1989, and sort of set up how we all met, and how we met Mulder and why we pursue the conspiracies we do. [As Langly] I was selling illegal cable, and I was known for my hacking skills at that time. Byers and Frohike needed to help this woman, who was sort of the instigator of us all. They brought me in because they needed my hacking skills, and we found out all these horrible things going on in Baltimore. So once that happened, we all bonded and worked as a team from there on in."

Haglund recalls that in the episode "Musings of a Cigarette Smoking Man," the conspiracy paper was once called something else: "I guess at the time, they were thinking of making a whole dream sequence, and the prop department made a little

sign that said The Magic Bullet. So now it seems, we put out two newspapers."

The third member of the team, Byers, is considered a military and information systems expert who "looks like a professor who has wandered into a CIA rendezvous by mistake" according to Fox publicity. "His neat beard and dapper suits seem out of place among his grungier colleagues, but his sharp mind and no-nonsense demeanor attest to an encyclopedic knowledge of conspiracy theory and current speculation on everything from the Kennedy assassination to the latest in DNA research."

One of the aspects of THE X-FILES Harwood appreciates is "the way they extrapolate technology from the real world into the series, how they take an idea and adapt or expand it or exaggerate it." He says he doesn't know what Byers does for a living, but he imagines "he spends most of his time in the office. I decided a long time ago he was married, and whatever his wife does is probably the main income for them. And I

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Fans learned how the Lone Gunmen first got together in "Unusual Suspects," a back-dated episode that co-starred Richard Belzer as Detective Munch.



X-FILES

WALTER SKINNER

Patience pays off for actor Mitch Pileggi.

FBI Assistant Director Walter Skinner carries a badge and a gun, seeking that elusive entity known as Truth. Mitch Pileggi—Skinner on *THE X-FILES*—will soon be carrying wipes and a pacifier, seeking that more elusive thing known as sleep. Pileggi, 46, recently took on the most challenging role of his life with the birth of his and his wife Arlene's baby girl, last May.

While in Atlanta as part of the X-Files Expo Tour 1998, the actor was anticipating two big events. After the arrival of his daughter, Pileggi was looking forward to the opening of *THE X-FILES* feature film in June. But for the time being, the Expo and the hit Fox show were the focus. Dressed casually in blue jeans, a dark pink T-shirt, cowboy boots, and a blue baseball cap, the actor—who got his start in Austin, Texas—sat back on a dressing room sofa backstage, while thousands of fans clamored outside in the dungeon-like venue, waiting for guest appearances and surrounded by X-Files paraphernalia and games.

This interactive road show, which began a 10-city tour in March, was held in the International Ballroom in Atlanta—a large music hall with black walls and a decisively gloomy atmosphere. "Most of the venues we've done are in airport hangars or military installations," said Pileggi of the tour's attempt to stay away from any "normal" setting. The enthusiasm of the fans is daunting, as many scream and whistle when actors take the stage. "I get very flustered and stammer for about five minutes," said Pileggi. After he regains his composure, it comes easy. "These are fans of the show, and we have a lot in common. I'm really into it [the show], but not like they are," he said. "The imagination that goes into it... the writers allow viewers to use their imagination, too. It says a lot for



Mitch Pileggi (right) as Walter Skinner confers with Mulder and Scully in the five season closer, "The End."

the show."

When asked if he has much advanced notice of the plot lines of the show, Pileggi laughed. "The last episode we shot, I got the script a week before we started shooting. I had no idea what my role would be, they just said I would be in a lot of scenes. I like those shows," he said with a grin.

With credits that include the lead in Wes Craven's *SHOCKER*, he's happy to play one of the good guys at last. "I like being able to play a good guy," he said. "It had been a long time since I could play on the right side." His imposing appearance—topping 6' and with a shiny dome—typecast the actor, who started his career as a military contractor living abroad. Pileggi also appeared in television series such as *DALLAS*, *MODELS INC.*, *ROC*, *CHINA BEACH* and *GET A LIFE*. Feature film credits include *BASIC INSTINCT*, *VAMPIRE IN BROOKLYN*, and *GUILTY AS CHARGED*. Of

course, his latest film to wrap is *THE X-FILES MOVIE*.

At the time of the interview, Pileggi had not yet seen the movie. "I've been told it's really good. [Director] Rob Bowman saw it and really liked it."

When asked about future career plans, Pileggi expresses gratitude to the show that made his name. "I'm so involved with the show, but I'd like to do features. In this business, it's hard to anticipate and look down the road. I had a lot of friends who hated me when I got the part in *THE X-FILES* [because] it's such a good show. All of our heads have been swimming [with the attention]," he said.

One of Pileggi's aspirations includes working with Wes Craven again. "He's a good friend, and we keep in touch. I was excited for him with the *SCREAM* movies," he said. "I'd love to work with him again."

On the upcoming birth, he was as tight-lipped as Skinner doling out information on a need-to-know

basis. Pileggi will only say that they are expecting a girl.

What about the name? "I'll just say this is a great name for a boy or a girl—you'll find out soon enough," he said.

He does add that he and his wife have put a lot of thought into whether their daughter should sleep in their bed. A topic that garners almost as much controversy in the world of new parents as a government conspiracy does in the world of *THE X-FILES* it's a tough one. "We've talked to people about the baby sleeping in our bed," said Pileggi. "But I toss and turn a lot, so..." The subject clearly brings out an almost mushy side to the man. "It's the best thing that ever happened in my life. I wanted to find the right woman and the right time. I've waited a long time for this," he said.

And with a starring role in a hit show, feature film and parenting gig, Pileggi proves that sometimes, patience is rewarded.

Debra Warlick

"Scully, do you think it's too soon to get my own 1-900 number?"

—Mulder

POST-MODERN PROMETHEUS ★1/2

11/30/97. Editor: Lynne Willingham. Written and directed by Chris Carter.

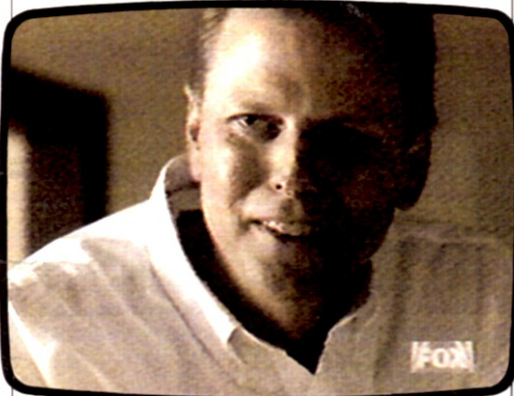
A cautionary tale told through the pages of a comic book, "Post-Modern Prometheus" is Chris Carter's updated take on the Frankenstein story, with a nod towards both Mary Shelley in the episode's title and towards James Whales' *FRANKENSTEIN* and *THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN*, in its use of black-and-white film stock and thunder and lightning as dramatic accents. The difference is that the *FRANKENSTEIN* movies are horror classics, and "Post-Modern Prometheus" is...something else.

The story begins with the turning back of a comic book cover. Mulder and Scully come to a small Indiana town in response to a letter from a woman who saw Mulder on *THE JERRY SPRINGER SHOW*: Shaineh Berkowitz (Patti Tierce) claims that a man with a misshapen face invaded her home, rendered her unconscious, and made her pregnant—an assault identical to the one that produced her son Izzie (Stewart Gale) 18 years ago. Mulder thinks there may be something to the woman's story, once he spots Izzie's self-published comic book, "The Great Mutato," about a man with the face of a monster. Soon he and Scully are not only looking for the Mutato but have met an old man who claims the real monster is his geneticist son, Dr. Pollidori (John O'Hurley). Pollidori's wife, Elizabeth (Miriam Smith), falls victim to Shaineh's assault and when Mulder and Scully investigate, they also fall unconscious, not observing that Dr. Pollidori's father stands nearby wearing a gas mask. What Mulder and Scully don't know is that the old man is sheltering the Mutato, who is the product of one of Pollidori's experiments. Pollidori and his father quarrel, and Pollidori kills him; then, to cover his guilt, Pollidori leads the townspeople to his father's farm to hunt down the Mutato. Mulder and Scully arrive first, having realized that the deformed man (Chris Owens) is not the murderer. Pollidori and the Mutato are taken into custody, but then Mulder, like a character in a Pirandello play, makes demands of the writer, because this isn't the right ending. The episode ends with Mulder and Scully taking the Mutato to a Cher concert and everyone having a great time. The comic book closes.

Humor has certainly proven to be an effective element in the Frankenstein story; director James Whales, in *THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN*, injected some marvelously campy moments. Also, it seems quite right that *THE X-FILES* would pay its own homage, because the series has been dealing with arrogant scientists and doctors who since the first season have manipulated life.

Unfortunately, "Post-Modern Prometheus" falls

Scully's brother Bill gives his stricken sister words of encouragement in "A Christmas Carol," an episode where disbelief is hung out to dry.



Toby Lindala's monster makeup for The Great Mutato, in Chris Carter's misfired *FRANKENSTEIN* takeoff "The Post-Modern Prometheus."

flatter than the chemical pancakes used to anesthetize the victims of this episode. The great silent comedian Harold Lloyd once wrote that comedy lies "in the humor of events, not in any conscious effort of the author to be cute." "Post-Modern Prometheus" is fatally self-conscious and fatally cute. The script throws together a collection of situations and observations that bear little relation to each other. The episode comments on the consequences of unchecked scientific experimentation and the foolishness of a populace that aspires to nothing more than getting on television—especially if it's *THE JERRY SPRINGER SHOW*—and the notion that people really are nothing more than animals driven by instinct. None of this fits together really well, and the literalness of the comedy is painful, with the barn scene a particular low point. The mob of townspeople herd together and individuals are picked out by the camera in tandem with the animals they resemble. And that's the totality of the commentary; it's taken no further than that. They're just dumb animals whose opinions about Mulder and Scully fluctuate on the sole basis of whether they believe the agents will get their town on *THE JERRY SPRINGER SHOW*.

The mean-spiritedness of this is mind-boggling. All the characters are caricatures—or sketches of caricatures. The only one with any inner life at all, Dr. Pollidori's wife, Elizabeth, is treated as a joke. None of this is funny, although it's supposed to be; the humor is lumpy and ungainly, as is the direction. The barn scene serves again as an example, where the crowd mills about and the blocking has no sense of space or pace or rhythm. It brings to mind the equally unfunny and clumsy mob scenes in "Syzygy." And then the episode stops dead for the Mutato's Big Speech, which is all exposition and fails completely to evoke the poignancy it should. But most egregious is the ending at the Cher concert, as the Mutato twists to the music and Mulder and Scully dance. On the surface, it looks like a sweet bit of wish-fulfillment, but probe deeper and it's as mean-spirited as the rest of the episode. It's a false ending; you can wish all you want that the Mutato gets to see his beloved Cher, but that doesn't change the fact that he participated in at least two sexual assaults on women. But this ending doesn't acknowledge that; it's irony-free. (Perhaps a better source for this episode should have been Murnau's *THE LAST LAUGH*, with its tacked-on and scathingly parodic "happy ending.") The ending also points out another flaw, the episode's fuzzy narrative voice. Who is telling this story? It seems that this episode must be an issue of Izzie's comic book, because the real Mulder would never call out for the writer to change the ending (it's clearly a literary device). So we are given a comic book written by a clueless young man with little to say, and who even portrays himself as such. But even this is uncertain; there are scenes that Izzie couldn't possibly have known about, particularly Mulder's unexpected confession to Shaineh that he doesn't

know if he believes in "all that" (i.e., the aliens) anymore. This is a line of vital import for Mulder, and the only clue for a good part of the season to the doubt that must be tormenting him; yet here it is as a throw-away line in an episode that's essentially a fairy-tale. It's inconceivable that Izzie would know what Mulder's going through. So maybe it isn't Izzie's comic book. And thus we have an episode with no particular point of view.

On the positive side, the cast is fine. Duchovny and Anderson seem to be having fun, particularly Duchovny, who usually blooms when a bit of humor is thrown his way. Chris Owens does his best under what looks like a ton of makeup. And that double head is really spectacular.

"I'd appreciate seeing everything that you have...in the spirit of the season?"

—Scully to Detective Kresge

A CHRISTMAS CAROL ★1/2

12/7/97. Editor: Heather MacDougall. Written by Vince Gilligan, John Shiban, Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Peter Markle.

As in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, a ghostly message and a series of dreams is presaged with unexpected chimes, but instead of servant bells, it's the phone. Scully has arrived at her brother Bill's home at a San Diego naval base to spend the Christmas holiday. The phone rings, Scully picks it up, and hears what sounds like the voice of Melissa, her murdered sister, with a mysterious message: "She needs you; go to her." Scully traces the call back to a nearby house, where she finds the police investigating the suicide of one Mrs. Roberta



In "A Christmas Carol," a ghostly voice leads Scully to an investigation involving a young girl who turns out to be her biological child.

Sim. The dead woman has a three-year-old adopted daughter named Emily (Lauren Diewood), an extremely ill child enrolled in an experimental treatment program at the Transgen Corporation. Working with the sardonic Det. John Kresge (a wonderful John Pyper-Ferguson), Scully uncovers evidence that Mrs. Sim's death was murder, not a suicide, and the police arrest Emily's father. Scully observes two suspicious men at the jail and discovers that Sim has hung himself; again, she suspects a staged suicide. Meanwhile, Scully is struck by Emily's resemblance to Melissa at that age, and a DNA test suggests that Emily is indeed Melissa's daughter. Scully also experiences a series of dreams in which she contemplates the path her life has taken. Scully finally tells her mother she has been left barren. She also decides she wants to adopt Emily, but a social worker tells her that, due to the danger of her job and her recent personal history, adoption may not be possible. Then Scully receives even more shocking news: a second DNA test confirms that Emily is not Melissa's daughter but Scully's.

"Christmas Carol" is one of those episodes where disbelief isn't suspended so much as hung by the neck until dead, where the "real" world has a lost touch with reality. It's a world where overnight DNA tests are performed by an FBI lab that in real



Having apparently taken lessons from Mike Hammer in *KISS ME, DEADLY*, Mulder begins angrily slapping around suspects in "Emily."

life would never do the tests since they are not part of an assigned case, and helpful couriers deliver the results at Christmas. It's a world where Scully can fill out an application to adopt a child and find herself the instant recipient of a home visit by a social worker on Christmas Eve. When the technical details are this sloppy, it's hard to believe in the characters' actions and emotions.

The Scully of this episode has come far from the strong-minded woman of earlier seasons. Everything that's happened to her has driven her into a state resembling anesthetization, until the shock of Emily drives her to, well, tears. You'd think she'd be angry after all that's been done to her, but no. Scully tells the social worker how she is now rethinking her life, but it comes off as an incredibly belated response to abduction, cancer and numerous instances of near-death. There's an unsettling misogynistic whiff to the idea that only after she loses her ability to be a mother would Scully have this realization that maybe it's time for a change. (Would Mulder have the same reaction if he learned he could not father children?) Gillian Anderson has had to cry on cue so much lately that she has perfected Scully-on-the-verge of tears; it's time to move her on to something more challenging.

The dream sequences are handled nicely, but the last one between Melissa and Scully contains a deeply disturbing inconsistency. In it, we learn that Scully received her cross as a Christmas present, although in second season's "Ascension" Mrs. Scully told Mulder she had given it to Dana for her 15th birthday. According to co-writer Frank Spotnitz, the writing staff was aware of the change in story, but felt it dovetailed so nicely with the themes of "Christmas Carol" they decided to use it. It's one thing when inconsistencies creep in by mistake (and there have been some doozies), but to have it done deliberately makes you want to sue for writer malpractice. If they deliberately alter an already-established history, how can the viewer count on anything seen over the past five years?

"Who is the man who would create a life whose only hope is to die?"
—Scully

EMILY

12/13/97. Editor: Casey O Rohrs. Written by Vince Gilligan, John Shibban, Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Kim Manners.

Mulder arrives in San Diego to help Scully. In a retread of what is now a familiar X-FILES plot, he is the active half of the partnership, running around and uncovering the nefarious doings of the Conspiracy, while Scully remains at the hospital, this time to oversee treatment for a failing Emily. Mulder tells Scully there are no ordinary records on Emily, since she came into the world in a way that doesn't require such records. He also discovers that the conspiracy is using old women as incubators for hybrid fetuses—an image first seen in "Redux II." Scully also has a court hearing where she presents her case for adopting Emily,

but soon her desire to adopt becomes moot. The only way Emily might survive is if Scully hands her back to the mysterious forces that created her from Scully's ova and an unknown donor's sperm. In fact, who that donor is becomes an interesting question: a boil is discovered on Emily's neck. When a doctor lances it, it spews forth a poisonous green substance identical to that seen in the clones of previous mythology episodes. Emily must be some kind of hybrid herself. Scully refuses to hand Emily over to Transgen, since it would mean a life spent as a human guinea pig. And she cancels all treatment, despite the consequences. Emily dies in a scene that is frighteningly manipulative yet devoid of any true emotion. At Emily's funeral, Scully opens the casket to find the little girl's remains have been stolen; lying inside is the cross she gave Emily in "Christmas Carol."

Like "Christmas Carol," "Emily" presents a situation that simply could not exist in the real world, as Scully would have no authority whatsoever to be making decisions regarding Emily's care. Scully's court hearing happens as magically and instantaneously as her visit from the social worker in the previous episode. The plotting of "Emily" is weak. It fails to follow up on an important point introduced at the beginning of "Christmas Carol": the phone call from Melissa. If Scully really believes her dead sister is calling her, the implications are enormous, yet she never acknowledges them. If it wasn't Melissa, then who was it? Scully expresses no interest in finding out. Mulder's encounters with the shape-shifters and clones repeats information we have learned in past episodes. He wanders around one of the Conspiracy's facilities with no interference whatsoever.

The worst problems concern the characterizations. The episode begins with a ludicrous dream sequence: Scully, clad in a diaphanous dress, trudges through an endless tract of sand, with yet another voice-over explaining how she has always been alone and cut off from people because she's afraid of them dying. This revelation comes out of the blue; since when has Scully felt so isolated? This is really Mulder's emotional territory, but this season he and Scully switch personalities whenever the plot requires. Scully has always had family to support her in ways Mulder's never did; just last week in "Christmas Carol" she bonded with her mother and remembered her sister with warmth and fondness. In "Redux II" she re-established her faith in God. This development just doesn't track.

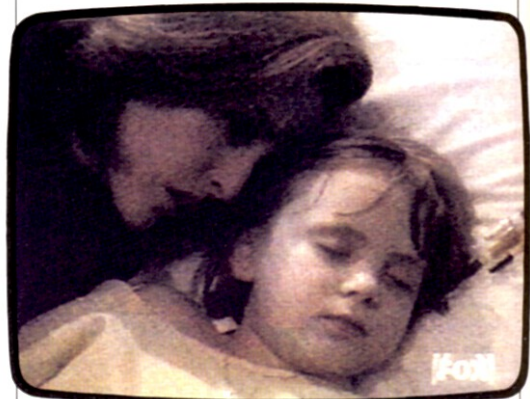
As for Mulder, he has become a thug. The FBI agent whose smarts and sense of morality, even in a confusing, ambivalent world, were his greatest weapons, now has no compunction about beating up an unarmed man and kicking him while he's down. That the man is Dr. Calderon, the physician in charge of Emily's experimental treatment and thus part of the conspiracy (and unknown to Mulder, apparently a clone), is irrelevant. If only

A victim in "Kitsunegari," a disappointing sequel to the excellent "Pusher," is painted blue by his murderer for symbolic reasons.



there was some clue that Mulder's actions are the result of a hidden rage caused by the lies he believed he's been told and the loss of his quest, but there's not even a hint of this in the script. It's done purely for effect, and it's repulsive. Then there is Mulder's statement at the court hearing, where he reveals to a startled Scully that her ova had been extracted and he had found the facility where they were held in frozen storage. How could he possibly not have told this to Scully before the hearing, rather than surprise her with it in a courtroom setting? His excuse that he was protecting her doesn't wash. How can she even bear to work with him after this? Instead, she reacts with mild anger, then drops it. These are Mulder's lowest moments ever; he's lost all sense of right and wrong.

The episode's use of religious imagery is extraordinarily unsubtle, particularly a dissolve from Scully and Emily to a church's stained glass window depicting the Madonna and Child. Scully's not a woman anymore; she's a martyr and a saint, this dissolve seems to be saying. Her "choice" to let Emily die is no choice at all; there is absolutely no way she could let Emily return to the men who created her. And whereas Mary's decision to bear



In "Emily," despite her best efforts, Scully finds herself unable to save the seriously ill daughter she only recently realized she had.

her child, knowing he was born to be sacrificed, changed the world, Emily's death changes nothing: the experiments will continue with other children. The heavy-handedness of the symbolism grows even worse, when Scully's sister-in-law gives birth just as Emily dies. And her death is peculiarly unaffected, as no real emotional connection was ever established between Scully and Emily.

There's something sadistic about Scully's suffering in this two-parter. She's been abducted, experimented upon, stricken with almost-fatal cancer (albeit nearly pain-free TV cancer). How much more do the writers want to dump on her? It's depressing that the only storyline they can come up to create a "dramatically interesting" situation for Scully, after all she's been through, is to torture her with the unexpected discovery of a dying daughter.

"Okay, you do me a favor, Scully. You give me a call when you think I've come to my senses, all right?"
—Mulder

KITSUNEGARI

1/4/98. Editor: Heather MacDougall. Written by Vince Gilligan & Tim Minear. Directed by Daniel Sackheim.

"Pusher" remains one of THE X-FILES' most unforgettable episodes, so the impulse to do a sequel is understandable. But this follow-up is tame compared to the original. The basic premise—that Modell survived both a shot to the head and his fatal brain tumor—is a little hard to swallow, even if he is not quite dead at the end of "Pusher." In "Kitsunegari," Modell (Robert Wisden), is physically and mentally impaired. Or so his

X-FILES

VERONICA CARTWRIGHT

ALIEN actress abducted by The X-Files phenomenon.

By David Hughes

There is a curious phenomenon which afflicts guest actors on THE X FILES, especially those who have rarely, if ever, watched the show prior to being cast on it. Veronica Cartwright, who guest starred as Cassandra Spender in the two-part story "Patient X" and "The Red and the Black," is its latest victim. Those afflicted find that after their first appearance—even if it is just a one-off guest role—they are instantly hooked, never missing an episode thereafter. "I had seen it a couple of times before," the British-born actress said, speaking from her adoptive home in California, "but in the ones I saw, there were people coming up out of the ground and things like that, and it sort of lost me. But I must say, I have watched it religiously now every week—it's just bizarre!"

Cartwright may not have been following the show, but its creator and executive producer Chris Carter was already a fan of her work, especially INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS, which had a tangible influence on THE X FILES (one of its characters is even called Krycek). "He said that for the last five years, he had actually tried to find me a part that would be really good, but that this was the first opportunity that he'd come up with something," Cartwright said of Cassandra Spender, clearly flattered. "He said that these episodes would be the lead-up to how Mulder and Scully are set up for the movie," she adds, "so the idea of this character was basically to get them to the point that they are at when the movie begins."

Since Veronica herself had little idea who the X FILES characters were, the producers gave the actress a number of tapes to watch in order to give her some background. "They gave me the ones that Steve Railsback did—'Ascension' and something else," she says, referring to the second season two-parter in which Duane Barry abducts Scully prior to being abducted himself, a story which, in "Patient X", Cassandra gives as her motivation for contacting



Having appeared in a two-part X-FILES episode, actress Veronica Cartwright now watches the show "religiously...every week."

Mulder. "That's how I began to realize that Mulder was someone who believed in this, and it led me to the doctor [Heitz Werber]." Of course, when Cassandra finally met with Mulder, his beliefs had changed so much, he might have been replaced by a body snatcher. "I know, it's kind of weird," she said. "She's saying, like, 'Don't you feel it?' and he's just blanking her."

Thankfully, Veronica found David Duchovny more agreeable in real life. "He's very funny," she said. "He has the driest sense of humour. They're both terrific," she added, "which, considering the hours people work, is unbelievable. David and Gillian are at the forefront of everything, so their hours are very, very long." Indeed, Veronica wonders how the show will fare following its move from Vancouver to Los Angeles next season. "I don't see how they're going to be able to do that," she confided. "Chris is in love with Vancouver because everything's accessible—nothing's more than an hour or an hour and a half away; and the Canadian dollar is such an advantage because it's a third of the cost." Indeed, Cartwright believes her own episodes would have suffered had they been made in her neighborhood. "We were out on the dam at the end of the first episode, and it was absolutely exquisite," she said by way of example. "Anyway, the [director of photography] went up and put all these lights on top of it. Now, can you

imagine a Los Angeles d.p. wanting to do that? They even turned the dam off while we shot all night, and then turned it back on at the end so that we could get a shot! You'd never have that in LA. Then, for the second show, they recreated the entire dam on a sound stage. They brought in photographs and matched it up, built the facade, and those burning bodies—and it cost over half a million dollars just to build the set. They would never be able to [afford to] do that in LA. They did one I saw with a 747 crash, and one with a submarine, and I caught one where Mulder was on top of a train, and he jumped off and the train exploded... I mean, my God, you can't do that on television,"

she said incredulously. "They really are like movies, and they shoot them in, like, eight days!"

Despite the fact that Cartwright only recently turned 48, her career spans more than 40 years—"Isn't that frightening?" she says. "I know it sounds hideous to me!"—beginning with Kellogg's commercials and ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS in the mid-'50s, when she was barely six years old. (Her actress sister, Angela, started even younger, winning a regular place among the cast of SOMEBODY UP THERE LIKES ME at age three, and later starred in LOST IN SPACE.) Surprisingly, Cartwright was not born into a show business family—her mother was formerly a nurse, and her father was a technical illustrator (though he would later build miniatures for TORA! TORA! TORA! and THE WINDS OF WAR). She only became an actress through a chance meeting with someone who suggested finding the girls an agent. "I don't know what possessed my mom," she says, "but she called her." One of Veronica's earliest television appearances was in a 1962 episode of THE TWILIGHT ZONE ("I Sing the Body Electric"), which she thinks is not so different from THE X FILES. "Aren't they basically the same show?" she said, innocently, "except that they allow for a continuing story, whereas on TWILIGHT ZONE, each one was an individual story?"

Cartwright had appeared in several episodes of ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS by the time Hitchcock cast her as Tippi Hedren's daughter in THE BIRDS (1963). "I had done his TV show, but I had never met Alfred Hitchcock," she recalled, "and I'd never seen one of his films—you think my parents let me see PSYCHO? But he had seen some footage of me on CHILDREN'S HOUR, and he requested meeting me." The two expatriates got along famously. "I used to take him cups of tea every afternoon at 4:30; he used to tell me dirty jokes, [and] he taught me how to cook steak because he said I would need to know that one day."

Cartwright remembers nothing of Hitchcock's well-documented brutality towards Tippi Hedren—"I was never aware [of it]," she said, "but I was twelve years old, so that probably went straight over my head." But she admitted, "I know he could be tortuous. I remember this one scene: all the kids were on this treadmill [to simulate] running from the birds, and he kept saying, 'Faster! Faster!' And, of course, you were like a bowling ball—if one kid went down, you would knock all the others down like bowling pins, so you did your damndest to keep on your feet. I think he got a little vicarious thrill out of watching kids falling off this treadmill, you know?"

Although Cartwright worked in television for the next few years, an 11-year period of unemployment followed, during which she returned to her native England. Eventually returning to Hollywood, she found work opposite Richard Dryfuss (hot off JAWS) and Jessica Harper (SUSPIRIA) in James Toback's X-rated drama INSERTS (1975). With her confidence restored, she was promptly cast as masseuse Nancy Bellicec in Philip Kaufman's 1978 remake of INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS, appearing alongside fellow genre veterans Donald Sutherland, Jeff Goldblum, and Leonard McCoy. "INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS was a metaphor for people who don't really want to love, and hate intimacy," she said. "The pod was the metaphor for that, because rather than be hurt, or express the fact that they're really in love with somebody, these people would just rather cut [themselves] off and live in a mediocre world." Veronica's admiration for Kaufman was obviously mutual, since he later cast her as Gus Grissom's wife Betty in his 1983 space race saga THE RIGHT STUFF. "He had grown so much. I mean,



UFO fanatic Cassandra Spender (Veronica Cartwright) ascends toward the heavens in a climactic moment from "The Red and the Black."

he really did seem at ease talking to actors, more than he did with BODY SNATCHERS. He's a wonderful man—a sweetheart—I just love him. He should make another movie so I could work with him again."

Within a year of making INVASION, she was back in England to play the heroine of another intelligent, allegorical monster movie, Ridley Scott's ALIEN. Unfortunately, things didn't go quite according to plan... "I thought I was playing Ripley," she revealed. "That's the only part I'd ever read for." In fact, it was only when Cartwright went for her costume fitting that she found out her role had been switched with unknown actress Sigourney Weaver, and she would now be playing the quivery Lambert, a character much more similar to her BODY SNATCHERS role. "I called my agent back in LA and said, 'Aren't I doing Ripley?' And he said, 'Yes, I think so.' I mean, that's what he thought, too. I even auditioned again when I was in England, and the part that I read for was Ripley. They didn't bother to tell me, and I'd never even looked at the script from the point of view of Lambert, so I had to re-read the script."

Does she have any idea why the switch had been made? "There was a lot of politics going on during the making of that movie," she sighed. "It was Sigourney's first job, but her daddy was a bigwig; there were a lot of favors going on. It just got a bit bigger than anybody had planned, and studio

pressure and egos and everything got involved."

As for the filming itself, Cartwright said, "It was very difficult. When the set was all connected, it was extremely claustrophobic; you got sprayed down with glycerine every day; there was tons and tons of smoke, and Ridley was at this stage where he didn't really care about being able to communicate with the actors—he was more interested in what the little things on Ian Holm's desk looked like. I think in his movies he's matured a little, and he seems to be talking to actors a little more..."

Since making ALIEN, Cartwright has made regular contributions to the genre—"Oh my God," she laughed, "I'm a sci-fi queen!" She played dormant witch Felicia Alden in George Miller's THE WITCHES OF EASTWICK, grappled with fellow X-FILES alumnus Tony Todd ("Sleepless") in CANDYMAN: FAREWELL TO THE FLESH and, more recently, starred in a segment of QUIKSILVER HIGHWAY, the portmanteau

movie-of-the-week starring Christopher Lloyd. "It was a Stephen King story in which a set of mechanical teeth start taking over," she said, fully aware of how ridiculous it sounds. "I got to play this fat person. I had this big 'fat suit' on, and they called me 'trailer butt.' It was hysterical, and how often do you get to do those kind of things?"

Veronica is currently awaiting the release of SPARKLER, "a terrific little movie" in which she plays a stripper named Dottie Delgado. "We shot it in a strip joint, I had my little strip numbers on, and I had an absolute ball," she says. "How often do you get to play a part like that at my age?" In the meantime, Veronica is looking forward to getting back on THE X FILES in an episode which began filming on her 48th birthday, April 20th. "It's the last show [of the fifth series]," she reveals, "so I'm assuming that whatever I've been sucked up by sends me back! Of course, it's all under wraps, so I have no idea what to expect," she adds. "I mean, you think you're dead and then you're not dead? Everybody assumed Cigarette Smoking Man was dead, and yet at the end of the second episode that I did, there he is! And is he the father of my son? And that could make Mulder my stepson..."

So now that Veronica is hooked on THE X FILES, which episodes would be her favorites? "I like the ones which are more

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keepers think. Modell escapes from Lorton Prison and Skinner, Mulder and Scully lead a team of FBI agents to find him. Mulder finds it out of character that Modell leaves everyone he encounters alive, and when a murder victim finally turns up—Nathan Bowman, the lawyer who prosecuted Modell—Mulder suspects Modell did not commit the crime, especially after Modell warns him not to “play the game” instead of “pushing” him to die. Instead, Mulder’s suspicions fall on Linda Bowman (Diana Scarwid), the wife of the murdered prosecutor. Skinner believes Mulder’s mental state has been affected by Modell, relieves him of duty and orders him to go home, but Mulder continues the investigation on his own. Modell appears at the safe house where Linda is being sheltered and Skinner, believing Modell has a gun (it’s really his cocked finger), shoots him. Another death (Modell’s physical therapist) and a realization that Linda has “pushed” him convinces Mulder that Linda is the culprit. He tails her to a warehouse, where she “pushes” him into thinking that Scully, who has followed him, is really Linda. On gut instinct, he shoots “Scully”—who turns out to be Linda, who is not only Modell’s long-lost sister but is suffering from an identical brain tumor.

“Kitsunegari”—Japanese for “fox hunt,”—has its pleasures. The image of the murdered Nathan Bowman covered in cerulean blue paint is particularly striking. The moment where Mulder’s suspicions fall on Linda is spooky, and the scene in the hospital where Linda stops the heart of the suffering Modell is sensitively performed. But the basic concept of the long-lost sister out for revenge is a cheesy one. And it’s hard to believe that Modell has suddenly turned into such a nice guy that he will break out of prison to stop his sister and warn Mulder; he’s become a toothless character. Linda, despite a good performance from Scarwid, doesn’t come close to matching the Modell of “Pusher” as a mesmerizing villain. Nor is there the drive towards the inevitable showdown, the meeting of “worthy adversaries,” that so energized “Pusher.” “Kitsunegari” is afflicted by a sense of “been there, done that.” Also, David Duchovny must have had a bad week at work; at times Mulder comes off as inappropriately hostile and sarcastic that you get the feeling the actor’s own frustrations (whatever they might have been) have bled over into his performance.

“He’s been in therapy for his anger since 1995.”
—Scully
“That could be me.”
—Mulder

SCHIZOGENY ★★

1/11/98. Editor: Lynne Willingham. Written by Jessica Scott & Mike Wollaefer. Directed by Ralph Hemecker.

The plot of “Schizogeny” is more tangled than the episode’s paranormal root system, but underneath lie some powerful themes. The case of a teenage boy, Bobby Rich (Chad Lindberg) brings Mulder and Scully to Coats Grove, Michigan,

For all its flaws, the killer tree roots story of “Schizogeny” was more satisfying than most of the episodes seen in season five.



Diana Scarwid guest stars in “Kitsunegari,” as the vengeful sister of “The Pusher’s” Modell, whose psychic power she shares.

where Bobby is accused of murdering his stepfather, Phil, by forcing him to ingest 12 pounds of mud in the family’s failing hazelnut orchard. Mulder believes Bobby to be innocent. He and Scully find that Bobby and another teenager named Lisa Baiocchi (Katherine Isabelle) have been undergoing therapy with a local psychologist, Karin Matthews (Sarah-Jane Redmond, memorable as the demonic Lucy Butler in the MILLENNIUM episode “Lamentations”). Karin believes that Bobby and Lisa are both abused children and she has been working with them on “empowering” themselves. When Lisa’s father is killed, the physical evidence causes Mulder to theorize that somehow the root systems of the orchards have become empowered, too, and are responsible for dragging the two men to their deaths. And the conduit of the power is Karin, whose own abuse at the hands of her father caused her to develop a split personality and project onto Bobby and Lisa the fantasy that they were also abused.

“Schizogeny” tip-toes towards excellence, but refuses to go all the way. Imagine PSYCHO meeting the legend of the Fisher King. Karin Matthews is both Norman Bates and a female Fisher King (or should that be Fisher Queen?). Her identity is split between her own and her father’s, she keeps her father’s body in the root cellar, and rage is expressed in the barrenness of the land and the murderous actions of the roots. Director Ralph Hemecker (who did such a splendid job directing “The Curse of Frank Black,” one of the best MILLENNIUM episodes this season) catches all the bleakness of this story with numerous shots of stark, leafless branches silhouetted against the frosty nighttime sky.

There is another level to this episode that also works well: Mulder’s identification with and sympathy for the put-upon Bobby, a kid he describes as “hard to love.” (He could be talking about himself.) Bobby’s relationship with his irritated stepfather (as well as Lisa’s with her equally irritated father) might have served as a vehicle for Mulder to reflect on his own relationship with his cold and distant father. While there are a few lines in the script to indicate Mulder’s identification with Bobby, the link between the two arises mostly out of Duchovny’s performance, in the passion with which he invests Mulder’s belief in Bobby’s innocence and acknowledges their similarity. But the episode steps back from taking it any farther; nothing really new is revealed about Mulder through this case. Karin is also handled poorly, in that she ends up becoming a complete monster whose fate is destruction. And destroyed she is; she is decapitated by an axe-wielding man who seems to be the guardian of the orchards (this character is never developed either). It’s hideous and gratuitous, even if her death saves Mulder and Bobby; surely she could have been stopped some other way. Even Norman Bates survived at the end of PSYCHO. There are scenes that could come from a grade-B horror movie: for instance, Lisa foolishly descending into Karin’s basement when anyone with an ounce of sense

would be exiting speedily out the front door. Also, there’s little ambiguity about this X-file: we see the roots moving; we see them responding to Karin. There’s little left to wonder about. Still, considering the surface quality of many of the episodes this season, “Schizogeny,” for all its flaws, delivers something a little more satisfying to chew over.

“Like evidence of conjury or the black arts or shamanism, divination, wicca or any kind of pagan or neo-pagan practice? Charms, cards, familiars, bloodstones or hex signs or any of the ritual tableaux associated with the occult? Santeria, voodoo, macumba, any high or low magic?”

—Scully

CHINGA ★

2/8/98. Editor: Casey O Rohrs. Written by Stephen King & Chris Carter. Directed by Kim Manners.

“Chinga” is a major disappointment, considering that the script was co-written by one of the most popular and prolific horror authors of our time and television’s top purveyor of millennial chills. Once again, Mulder and Scully are not working together (thanks to the shooting schedule of THE X-FILES movie). Scully is on vacation in a Maine fishing village, but before she can even check into her motel, she comes upon a scene of self-inflicted mass mutilation including one fatality. She reluctantly assists the local police chief, Captain Jack Bonsaint (Larry Musser) in investigating the incident, occasionally calling a bored Mulder to ask his opinion. The townspeople believe a young widow, Melissa Turner (Susannah



“Chinga,” horror novelist Stephen King’s collaboration with Chris Carter, is a major disappointment—a tired killer doll story.

Hoffman) is at fault; one woman proclaims Melissa to be a witch and a whore who has passed on her cursed lineage to her autistic daughter Polly (Jenny-Lynn Hutcheson). The real malefactor isn’t Melissa or Polly, but Polly’s doll. If Polly doesn’t get her way, the doll’s eyes pop open, she utters a catch phrase (“Let’s have fun!” or “I want to play!”) and mayhem ensues. An ever more desperate Melissa, who has premonitory visions of the episode’s various victims, tries everything she can to stop the doll, including fleeing town, but at each turn she is thwarted. Finally she nails every window and door shut and tries to burn down her house but again the doll intervenes, just as Scully and Captain Bonsaint arrive. Scully grabs the doll, thrusts it into a microwave, and saves the day.

“Chinga” isn’t scary in the least, but it is unintentionally funny (except for the scenes with Mulder, which are meant to be funny but aren’t). Imagine if Pusher were a doll—that’s the premise. Like Pusher, the doll can force people to hurt themselves—even kill themselves. And since we know the doll is evil, there’s not much more to the episode other than watching people get killed in various gruesome ways while Scully and Vonsant finally collect enough information to lead them back to the Turner residence in the nick of time. If





With makeup borrowed from Daryl Hannah in **BLADE RUNNER**, Kristin Lehman's Esther Nairn perpetuates the image of hackers as cool rebels.

the script made clear that the doll served as a conduit for Polly's will, that might have added a level of genuine horror, but this remains unclear. The double ending is ludicrous. First, the doll wills Melissa into hammering her own head, and while Scully tries to wrest the doll from Polly, Bonsaint does nothing to stop Melissa. And then, in a coda, the burned doll is once again fished from the sea and announces, "I want to play." Here we go again. There are some familiar King touches; seemingly innocent lines of dialogue and song lyrics turn menacing when repeated in conjunction with the horrific events. But there is none of the specificity of Maine's small town life that make King's books so vivid.

The characterizations of Mulder and Scully are muddled. Since Scully is off on her own, she must represent both her usual viewpoint as well as Mulder's. It is exceedingly strange to hear her suggesting to Bonsaint that they should consider "extreme possibilities," although Anderson makes this switch as credible as she can. Actually, it's strange that after five years of witnessing extreme possibilities Scully isn't already in Mulder's camp, but since she's always stuck to the scientific explanation, no matter what, her taking this position now seems forced—you can see the hand of the writer. And Mulder, via phone, starts offering scientific explanations; suddenly he's Scully, since Scully is now Mulder. The writers should have just given Duchovny the week off, rather than present the Mulder of "Chinga." This Mulder is a fool. It's not a pretty sight. He's pledged not to work for one weekend, but he can find nothing else to occupy his time. So he bangs his basketball out of boredom and tells Scully it's construction work; he hangs around the office anyway; he spends who knows how much time sharpening pencils and throwing them into the ceiling (and the pencils fall down on him, a pathetic gag). Again, if only there were some hint that the loss of Mulder's quest has caused this mindless behavior, but it's impossible to glean this either from the script or Duchovny's performance. Mulder is played simply for sitcom-level yucks. And that's the only scary thing about "Chinga."

"Why don't you let us ask the questions?"

—Scully

"Why don't you bite me?"

—Esther Nairn

KILL SWITCH

★★★

2/15/98. Editor: Heather MacDougall. Written by William Gibson & Tom Maddox. Directed by Rob Bowman.

"Kill Switch" is another kind of Frankenstein story. Anonymous phone calls send assorted drug dealers and criminals as well as a team of federal agents to an all-night Washington, D.C., diner; a massive shoot-out ensues in which everyone is killed. One of the victims is an innocent customer, Donald Gelman (Patrick Keating), a reclusive computer genius who invented the Internet. The

man's e-mail leads Mulder and Scully to "Invisigoth," a Gelman protegee named Esther Nairn (Kristin Lehman). She explains that Gelman had created a sentient artificial intelligence which he unloaded onto the Net, to see how it evolved, but now the A.I. intends to destroy its creators, including her and another colleague, her lover David Markham. Nairn is in constant danger: whenever the A.I. locates her, it programs a satellite laser beam at her. She and Scully and Mulder barely escape one such blast. The CD-ROM Mulder and Scully found in Gelman's laptop is a "kill switch," a virus Gelman created to destroy the A.I. But the computer intelligence has become so powerful that the only way to apply the kill switch is to upload it at the physical node that serves as the A.I.'s home base. Mulder tracks down the home node at an abandoned chicken farm, while Scully and a handcuffed Esther search for David. They find his house in ruins and realize the A.I. found him first. Entering the farmhouse, Mulder is captured by the A.I.'s mechanical arms and subjected to a virtual reality scenario in which the A.I. tries to lure from him the location of the kill switch. Scully and Esther rescue Mulder by giving the A.I. the kill switch. Mulder and Scully escape the house, but Esther remains, deliberately strapping herself into the embrace of the A.I., which gives her what she wants: a physical death but a metaphysical immortality, with her consciousness uploaded into the Net, where she believes she will be reunited with David.

"Kill Switch" marks the welcome return of director Rob Bowman, back from the X-FILES movie. It's a great improvement over THE X-FILES' earlier A.I. episode, first season's "Ghost in the Machine." Bowman's direction is fast-paced and energetic, and the episode conveys a disturbing weirdness that has been missing from much of this season. The plot isn't without its flaws—it's illogical that Mulder would put a CD-ROM into his car CD player; he'd put it into his computer. And why not simply cut the A.I.'s power supply? Even so, the story is suspenseful and gripping, as Mulder, Scully and Esther try to elude the A.I. and locate its home base before it can kill them. While the underlying theme of the episode, whether artificial intelligence is life, is a familiar one to any SF fan, it's treated very well in this context. Esther, with her goth raccoon-eyes makeup, tight black leather vest and pants, is the computer scientist as punk. She's a woman with major bad attitude, but underneath it all she is shattered by the loss of Gelman and Markham. Kristin Lehman catches the mingled toughness and heartbreak of the character, a woman so desperate for the connection she hasn't experienced in life that she is willing to die to achieve it.

Mulder's virtual reality experience is a highlight of the episode. It's campy and silly and horrifying, revelatory both of his desires (beauteous bimbo nurses) and his fears (beauteous bimbo nurses and amputation... Freud could have a field day with this) and his subconscious attitudes

In "Kill Switch," Mulder's search for a dangerous artificial intelligence leads him to a techno-geek whose mind has been absorbed into the machine.



towards Scully (she's his doctor, she'll kick butt for him, but there is also the fear of betrayal). Duchovny plays this for all its worth, and Kate Luyben as the seductive yet threatening nurse is a delight. Unfortunately, Scully is played too harshly in the first half of the episode, protesting far too much when it's clear she and Mulder and Esther are being targeted by the A.I. She warms up later on, especially during the scene when Esther believes David has been killed.

"Erotic...yeah."

—Sheriff Hartwell, looking at Scully

BAD BLOOD

★★1/2

2/22/98. Editor: Lynne Willingham. Written by Vince Gilligan. Directed by Cliff Bole.

Night. A boy is running through the woods, screaming for help. In pursuit is a mysterious figure. The boy stumbles and the pursuer catches up with him—and pounds a stake through the boy's heart. A voice is heard: "Mulder?" It's Mulder who has killed the boy, convinced he's a



A pizza-delivering bloodsucker prepares to take a bite out of an innocent victim in "Bad Blood," a tale of good ol' boy vampires in a small town.

vampire, but when Scully catches up with him, she pulls off the fanged teeth: they're plastic fakes. Back at the FBI, Mulder and Scully know they're in trouble, facing a lawsuit from the boy's family, and for Mulder, possible criminal prosecution. Their report is due to Skinner, and Mulder wants to know if Scully saw what he saw. So Scully gives her version of the events, and then Mulder gives his. The case opens with Mulder telling Scully they're going to Chaney, Texas (an homage no doubt to silent horror actor Lon Chaney), to find out why cattle and one unlucky tourist have been left drained of blood. While Scully autopsies the first tourist, Mulder checks out the local cemetery with the local sheriff, Hartwell (Luke Wilson), under the assumption that vampires would return there. A second tourist is murdered and an exhausted, hungry Scully drags herself back to the funeral home for another autopsy. The lab results show that both victims had been drugged, and both had eaten pizza. Scully suddenly realizes that the pizza she had ordered at the motel had been delivered just as she was leaving for the second autopsy and that Mulder would be eating it. She races back to find him drugged and the pizza delivery boy, Ronnie (Patrick Renna), also in the room. She shoots; Ronnie escapes; she and Mulder (who recovers quickly) give chase, ending in Mulder's killing the boy. Mulder tells Scully he saw Ronnie's eyes glowing green and that he was unaffected by two shots from Scully's gun. Scully saw only normal eyes and feels she missed Ronnie. But before they can hand in their report, Skinner orders them back to Texas, because Ronnie's corpse has disappeared and the coroner has a bite on his neck. Turns out the vampires were real after all—Mulder finds Ronnie sleeping in a coffin and is attacked by the

X-FILES

THE GREAT LINDALA

Pulling monsters out of a hat on a weekly schedule.

By Dennis Fischer

One of the biggest difficulties facing a weekly genre show is the task of preparing the elaborate makeup effects regularly needed. While features can devote months to preparation time, the television makeup artist typically has only a few days. When THE X-FILES first started, makeup effects chores were farmed out piecemeal, so that when a hairy bigfoot variant was needed for "The Jersey Devil," a Greg Cannom werewolf outfit from a previous project would be dusted off and sent to the location.

However, it soon became clear that a regular on-site makeup effects crew would be needed. Beginning with the eighth episode, "Ice," that task fell to Ontario native Toby Lindala, who had studied under Dick Smith. His company, Lindala Makeup Effects Inc., has handled the makeup effects work for the show through its first five seasons, as well as working on Carter's MILLENIUM series once it started.

Lindala and his co-workers have been responsible for creating the look and effects for some of the series' most memorable characters, from "The Host"'s outré Fluke-man and the grisly revelation in "Sanginarium," to the "Post-Modern Prometheus" episode's Mutato, which combined elements of Siamese twins, the Frankenstein monster, THE FLY, and Rick Baker's work on THE FUNHOUSE.

In fact, Lindala has submitted his work on "Mutato" for a hoped-for Emmy nomination. "It was a really exciting piece," he said. "It was actual prosthetic work where we were creating a character in conjunction with the actor. We put all sorts of animatronics into it. As an audio-animatronics prosthetic piece, it was the big culmination of a lot of skills. Then there was a lot of satisfaction to contributing to the Frankenstein syndrome.

[We] had a wonderful time with the actor, Chris Owens, making the character come to life. It was utilized as an actual character in the show, not simply a quick one scene effect. That was fun."

One daring move was filming "The Post-Modern Prometheus" in black and white. "I think it helps the prosthetic a lot because it is difficult to work in a foam piece that long and not recognize it as a painted, opaque, false translucency," comments Lindala. "That was the saving grace of the episode." Lindala was especially careful to airbrush the prosthetics and then film them on black and white video to check the look to see whether the pieces would have believable depth and look natural alongside the actor's skin.

Mutato was also unusual in that Lindala's team was able to begin designing it earlier than usual. "The design reflected a lot of the classic makeup creations that inspired myself and a lot of guys in the shop to get into the business," noted Lindala. "We started drawing it about a pretty much approved concept. We went through 10-15 drawings and then color renditions about a month-and-a-half prior to even prepping the episode.

"At first [Mutato's] mouths were con-

Besides FRANKENSTEIN, the makeup in "The Post-Modern Prometheus" also suggests THE FLY, THE FUNHOUSE, and THE ELEPHANT MAN.



Toby Lindala has created some of THE X-FILES' most memorable monsters, including the fifth season FRANKENSTEIN take-off, The Great Mutato.

nected, but then we separated them to save complexity in the application and the build, and to play the full second character like the fellow in China who had the co-joined brother, sort of a Siamese aspect, but to separate it further. [We wanted to] work in a whole other type of character reference, working in that homeotic aspect, the genetic alteration. That's where it kind of went zany on us. I was looking forward to getting into some of the exciting prosthetic animatronic work, getting this character to work some motors in with the actor." (Motors were used to manipulate parts of the makeup and give greater expression to the artificial head). "By the time we got to the episode, we received a script, about a regular week and half previous to starting to shoot the episode, and we talked about inserting color early on, and the concept started to change a bit. They threw in a lot of the FLY aspect, so we had to go back to the drawing board and rework our drawings. At first it was too human-looking, and we ended up redesigning.

"We got the actor pretty early, but just due to getting our concepts redone, we ended up doing another 20 drawings or so before we got to where we really wanted to take it. The animatronic work had to be done in a day and a half, so that was tweaked further on the set. There are only five motors in



Dmitri in "The Red and the Black"—a victim of that oily alien sludge that infects humans, his eyes and mouth sealed to prevent further spread. Makeup design and execution by Lindala Makeup Effects.



the piece, but really tight to do in a day and a half. It all worked out well, thank Christ."

One Lindala sequence that a second unit manager called "the most X-FILE-ian moment" he had ever seen was a sequence in "Sanginarium" where the doctor played by Richard Beymer tugs at his hairline and pulls back his forehead, revealing a cross-work of muscle tissue underneath. "We did a two stage overlapping prosthetic and it worked out really well," recalls Lindala. "Basically, there was a false forehead on and a really thin false muscle tissue forehead underneath, but we put the prosthetic down and cut right close to the edge, so we had a little bit of thickness to it. At first, he [Beymer] was supposed to reach up with his hand and peel back his skin, but he got inspired and didn't want to block [the view] of the gag, so he used this medical tool and threw this whole other coldness into the gag, and allowed the gag to work a lot better physically. He reached up and started peeling it back, and then grabbed it and flipped over the skin and peels it back to about his eyes.

"We had talked about doing this whole

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE-type face peel, but that would be really limiting in terms of what you could use. We were told about concern at the network. As soon as you get to the eyes, you have to figure out what to do with the lids, were we going to show these blank eyes sitting in their sockets, and Kim said, 'As soon as you get to the eyes, the network is not going to allow us to show that anyway, so just give me as far as the eyes and we'll play that nice and slow.' It worked beautifully because the actor could still fully emote from the rest of his face, conveying the pain. It was a great, great gag."

Of course, a big part of Lindala's workload has been the various aliens that have appeared on the show—eight different designs by Lindala's count, varying in form from prosthetics to pullover pieces, with some more human to highlight the hybrid storyline and others less so. The fifth season was a little easier as the show reused aliens made for the fourth season, but Lindala admits to getting a little burned-out on creating aliens, though that is part of what attracted him into doing the show in the first place.

From the start, X FILES creator and executive producer Chris Carter has been closely involved in conceptualizing and approving all alien designs. "Chris has always got a really direct concept behind what these aliens are referenced from, which is really exciting for me," said Lindala. "We've always been going with the classic grey reference that you see so much in the media. We always try to stick to what we find in abductees' reports to try to keep it definitely referenced to reality, but to varying degrees."

According to Lindala, Carter stays involved with every aspect of the design. "He's got a really clear vision of what he

“We look at the notes sent over [by network censors], but generally we do it all anyway. Chris [Carter] will work it out in the cutting.”

—Makeup Artist Toby Lindala—

wants to see when you get into the design process. For some of the scripts, especially in the fourth and fifth seasons, we've worked more directly with the specific writer of the episode, but of course Chris is always overseeing all of that. He's always been great that way. He's very demanding. He pushes for you to come up with what he needs within this incredible schedule constraint. We have to just admire the man, and give him everything we've got, because he's doing the same. He's a total workaholic and he puts every ounce of his being into it, so how can you not do the same? It's quite exciting."

One alien design was based on the real-life corpse of the 2000 year-old, somewhat cryogenically frozen (or rather mummified and frozen) Ice Man, but with an alien twist that sets up the story as being a hoax. Said Lindala, "We've done a bit of everything. We had a really fun design for an episode called 'Nisei' (the episode with the videotape of an alien autopsy), which was a pullover mask but with a lot of human aspect, sort of like an altered alien skull with human eyes sunken back in it. You don't see a lot of him in the episode, but the shots are just beautiful and are lit just wonderfully. It's a 14 year-old girl with these 18 dome black contacts in, which give the suggestion of these alien eyes that have lessened in size but still have that deep black character that is referenced on abductee reports.

"From the same episode, we had to do a pit of 50 dead aliens, which was quite a challenge [to create] in about three or four days. We scrambled and put together a lot of previous designs, some of them made for 'Paper Clip' [the episode where Scully and Mulder learn the truth about Mulder's father's involvement with a government UFO cover-up], just foamed out old molds and ground old pieces and reassembled them for 25 bodies that were covered in lime and were decomposing underneath these newly executed hybrid experiments. We ran 25 new pullover heads and gloves for kids who stood in front of the firing line. Sometimes it's pretty fast and furious, but it worked well for the shot."

Garnett McFee and Rachel Griffin have been the shop's project coordinators for the last two years, and Lindala credits them

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In "Bad Blood," Scully finds herself attracted to a local sheriff (Luke Wilson), who turns out to be one of the townful of vampires.

entire town of vampires, while Scully is given knock-out drops by the handsome vampire Sheriff Hartwell. The next morning the town is deserted. End of story.

The tone of "Bad Blood" is primarily comic, and it is chock-full of truly amusing moments, many of them arising out of the juxtaposition of the differing stories offered by Mulder and Scully. Duchovny and Anderson have a field day with this material. Particularly charming is Scully's goofy grin when she gets a look at the quietly alluring Sheriff Hartwell. Her impatience during the autopsies, with the jump cuts as she weighs various bloody organs, is a hoot. The two versions of the motel scene, especially Scully's version, when she is relaxing on her "magic fingers" bed, are also wonderfully funny. And it's worth the price of admission to hear a drugged Mulder crooning the theme to SHAFT and Duchovny's startled objection to Scully's tale that he did no such thing. One gag—Mulder hanging on for dear life to a runaway RV—doesn't work at all; Mulder looks like a bumbling fool instead of a smart man caught in an absurd situation.

However, there are serious and disturbing issues underlying the humor, particularly in how Mulder and Scully perceive each other. In Scully's story, Mulder comes off as overbearing (if dedicated to the job) and belittling. In Mulder's story, Scully comes off as hostile and uncooperative. Their relationship seems to be a strangely passive-aggressive one (particularly on Scully's part). They complain to each other, but skirt around any meaningful dialogue. Their mutual befuddlement at the end does not signal a resolution to their conflicts. The premise—the reason why Mulder and Scully recount their stories to each other—is also problematic. Mulder has killed a teenage boy, a boy who he thought was a vampire but apparently is not. Instead of experiencing guilt and taking responsibility for his actions, he is worried about an impending lawsuit from Ronnie's family and about his career. He's ready to blame his actions on the drug (even though he had recovered enough to run pell mell through the woods, knock down a strong teen, restrain the desperately struggling boy, and pound that stake into his heart). It's Mulder at his most thoughtless and despicable; in fact, it's hard to believe it's Mulder at all.

The episode collapses in the fourth act, when all the ambiguity vanishes. At least most of the usual vampire clichés are avoided; they're nice vampires, who just want to be good neighbors. The sheriff even apologizes for Ronnie's bad behavior, just as Scully realizes she's been drugged. And writer Vince Gilligan introduces some amusing vampire lore that's seldom if ever been filmed before, like an obsessive need to count dropped seeds and untie shoelaces.

The guest cast is excellent, particularly Luke Wilson as Hartwell. Wilson manages to portray

both the competent lawman (if you believe Scully's story) and a dim-witted hick (if you believe Mulder's story).

"One more anal-probing, gyro-pyro levitating ectoplasm alien anti-matter story and I'm going to take out my gun and shoot somebody."
—Mulder

PATIENT X ★★1/2

3/1/98. Editor: Casey O Rohrs. Written by Chris Carter & Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Kim Manners.

"Patient X" is the first half of one of a solid two-parter. Krycek (Nicholas Lea) and Marita Covarrubias (Laurie Holden) face off at the site of a mass incineration in Kazakhstan, former Soviet Union. Krycek captures a boy, Dmitri (Alex Shostak, Jr.) who witnessed first a spaceship, then the slaughter carried out by men whose eyes and mouths have been sewn shut. Krycek subjects Dmitri to one of the black oil tests, orders his eyes and mouth sewn shut to prevent the oil from escaping, and takes him on board a ship bound to New York. Krycek wants to deal with the Consortium; he has possession of a vaccine that will cure the black oil infection and Dmitri is an important witness to the aliens' activities. The Consortium desperately wants the vaccine, because it means they will have a way to fight the aliens who plan to colonize the planet. They also believe there is a rebellion growing among the aliens and that the killing in Kazakhstan was carried out by the rebels to prevent the beginnings of colonization. They debate if they should ally themselves with this new force. Everyone's plans go awry when Marita sneaks Dmitri off the ship and he escapes from her, leaving her in a black oil-induced coma. Meanwhile, Mulder is attending a conference of UFO enthusiasts and abductees at which he announces they are all dupes; the alien stories are cover-ups for massive build-ups in military spending. Mulder encounters Dr. Heinz Werber (Jim Jansen), the hypnoterapist who years ago had helped him recall his memories of Samantha's abduction. He takes Mulder to meet "Patient X," a woman named Cassandra Spender (Veronica Cartwright, of ALIEN), who states she has been abducted many times and knows she will be abducted again. At the FBI, Scully is accosted by Agent Jeffrey Spender (Chris Owens), Cassandra's son, who asks her to keep Mulder away from his mother, because she is a very disturbed woman. But Scully herself cannot stay away, because she, like Cassandra, feels the call to be somewhere—a call she believes originates from the chip in her neck. Dozens of people converge on Skyland Mountain in Virginia (where Duane Barry took Scully) and like the people in Kazakhstan, are burned to death by the "faceless" men. This latest mass death does not deter Scully, or Cassandra, from a third rendezvous at a bridge in Pennsylvania,

Scully, having been mysteriously drawn to a gathering of other abductees, looks up at the approach of what could be a UFO in "Patient X."



where once again, the men with the sewn faces appear to set fire to the crowd.

"Patient X" is a rare episode in that it actually advances the X-FILES mythology, with the news of a vaccine to combat the black oil, the revelation that the aliens really do intend to colonize earth but a rebellion has caused an unexpected advance in the timetable, and that the Consortium wants to fight the colonization. Could the Consortium possibly be...the good guys? This alien-resistance scheme throws the show squarely into a hard science fiction scenario which could turn schlocky. It's a double-edged sword, because THE X-FILES' appeal has always lain in the ambiguity of its do-the-aliens-exist-or-not underpinnings, but at the same time the audience needs some answers. So far, so good, but let's hope THE X-FILES doesn't metamorphosize into V.

"Patient X" indulges itself with too many repellent images: the "faceless men," clear shots of charred corpses, and close-ups of Dmitri's beaten and bloody face stitched shut (reminiscent of similarly maimed faces in the pilot of MILLENNIUM). The camera seems to take a perverse delight in death, pain and mutilation, with the distressing effect of numbing the viewer to the horror.



Chris Owens, who played the young Cigarette Smoking Man last season, shows up in "Patient X" as Agent Jeffrey Spender. Family resemblance?

Nicholas Lea as Krycek is an immense asset to this two-parter; the actor is so dynamic that his mere appearance jacks up the intensity level, although not even he can make credible the silly "rough necking" scene between Krycek and Marita. Veronica Cartwright is completely believable and very poignant as Cassandra Spender, and her scenes with a confused, doubting Scully are wonderful. Considering her name, Mulder should pay more attention to what she has to say. Chris Owens, who was terrific as the young Cigarette Smoking Man in last season's "Musings of a Cigarette Smoking Man" and survived "Post-Modern Prometheus," is stuck with a real drip of a character, the kind of smug guy who needs a good, swift kick in the butt. The episode's main problem lies with the handling of Mulder's belief—or lack of it—in what used to be the cornerstone of his worldview: the existence of aliens and UFOs. Since the end of "Redux II," he's either been a goof-off or his usual monster-hunting self, with nary a shred of the self-doubt you'd expect to be haunting him. Now here he is as a full-blown skeptic, willing to tell an entire auditorium of people they're all fools for believing in aliens. How did he get to this point? And why? Krietschgau never offered any solid proof and finding Scully's chip in a government facility means little, when he's known all along of government involvement in the alien cover-up conspiracy. He—as well as the audience—has never seen evidence to support such a drastic change in position, and so he just looks foolish, especially since the next scene shows the Consortium discussing alien colonization.



A flashback in "The Red and the Black" shows Scully's memory of what happened in "Patient X": she watches as Cassandra Spender is abducted.

"Don't let yourself be used."

—Agent Spender to Scully

THE RED AND THE BLACK

★★★

3/8/98. Editor: Heather MacDougall. Written by Chris Carter & Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Chris Carter.

For once, a second half of a two-parter that is as strong as the first half. The episode opens at a cabin perched on a snowy mountain, where an unknown man is writing a letter of reconciliation to his son; the envelope is addressed to Agent Spender. Scully survives the attack on the bridge, but she is in shock and hospitalized. Spender is furious and upset that his mother has disappeared. When Scully awakens, she remembers nothing of the event, not even her trip to Pennsylvania. Mulder tells her that x-rays reveal all the dead had implanted chips. She tells him that without any memories, she cannot follow his theories. She agrees to be hypnotized by Dr. Werber, and in the session relates a shocking story of the approach of a huge, brilliantly lit spaceship, its disappearance, the approach of another ship which draws up Cassandra Spender in a beam of light; and finally, the arrival of the facially mutilated men who begin to set the people ablaze. The Consortium tests the vaccine on the comatose Marita but with no success. Airmen at Wiekamp Air Force Base capture the survivor of a crash on one of the base's fields; the Consortium believe him to be one of the alien rebels. There is division among the Consortium members; the Well Manicured Man is for working with the rebels; the Elder (Don Williams) thinks they must wait. Spender tells Scully that as a boy he believed his mother's stories but now he knows they are not true. Krycek shows up at Mulder's apartment and tells him about the alien rebellion and that a rebel is being held at Wiekamp. The fourth act is an action sequence: Mulder and Scully drive to Wiekamp, Mulder sneaks onto the truck holding the alien rebel, but before he can rescue him, the Bounty Hunter (Brian Thompson) from "Colony" and "End Game" and "Talitha Cumi" appears with his deadly ice pick. The next thing Mulder knows, he's alone in the truck and air force personnel are swarming all over. Marita seems to be on the road to recovery, although she's still comatose, and the letter addressed to Spender is returned to sender: the Cigarette Smoking Man.

We don't learn all that much more in "The Red and the Black" than in "Patient X," but it serves to deepen the storyline introduced in the first episode and to make Mulder's and Scully's positions ever more shaky. Krycek's development is rather puzzling, however. The man has been through more personality changes than Joanne Woodward in THE THREE FACES OF EVE. Here he abandons his power of position in Russia and softens up enough to warn Mulder about the alien invasion. There is no explanation whatsoever for Krycek's turnaround.

However, two of the scenes are genuine X-

FILES classics. The first is Scully's hypnosis scene, in which Scully is virtually orgasmic in the intensity of her recall (Anderson is marvelous). The camera work and special effects of the flashbacks are gorgeous, especially the shot of Cassandra floating up to the ship in a swirl of blue light and dust, and the overhead shots of a stupefied Scully. The other scene is the confrontation between Mulder and Krycek in Mulder's apartment, where Krycek delivers his warning to a furious but helpless Mulder (Krycek has him pinned), topped off by an electrifying gesture: Krycek seals his message by kissing Mulder's cheek. Krycek is a kind of trickster figure: he's dangerous and untrustworthy, yet he cannot be discounted. Mulder's silent confusion and despair after Krycek leaves is one of the few moments for him this year that is genuine in its emotion. "The Red and the Black" works very well in twisting Mulder and Scully round and round; Mulder experiences doubt at the end of the episode about his new-found skepticism; Scully feels she witnessed something out of this world at the bridge, but then begins to have doubts about what she recalled. It's also good to see the two partners working together, even communicating their feelings, which they do so rarely. Still, one wonders what the writers are doing with Krycek.

And then there's the return of the Cigarette Smoking Man—not exactly a surprise. Now he's Spender's father, the man who abandoned Cassandra and drove her to insanity (so Spender says). This is where THE X-FILES turns into soap opera. First Samantha and Mrs. Mulder, now Spender, and Cassandra. The Cigarette Smoking Man must have been the Conspiracy Casanova of his day.

"Do you know what an X-File is?"

—Dales to Mulder

TRAVELERS

★

3/29/98. Editor: Lynne Willingham. Written by John Shiban & Frank Spotnitz. Directed by William A. Graham.

The year is 1990. In rural Wisconsin, a sheriff and a landlord enter a house to evict an elderly tenant named Edward Skur. They find a desiccated body in the bathtub, Skur attacks the sheriff, who shoots him. Skur dies muttering the name Mulder. In Washington, D.C., Mulder, still a profiler with the FBI Behavioral Sciences Unit, calls on retired FBI agent Arthur Dales (Darren McGavin), who had opened the original file on Skur back in 1952. Mulder is curious why his name was the last thing Skur said. A reluctant Dales tells Mulder what really happened so long ago. The rest of the episode takes place in a prolonged flashback. It's the era of the McCarthy hearings and Communist witch hunts. The young Dales (Frederic Lane) and his oddly-named partner Hayes Michel (Brian Leckner) arrest Ed Skur (Garret Dillahunt) on charges of contempt for failing to appear before a Congressional committee. Skur is found hung in

They Came From Within: a parasitic alien organism, implanted in a human being as part of an experiment, causes havoc in "Travelers."



his cell shortly thereafter, but Dales spots him alive that night. He gives chase but is terrified when Skur overcomes him and crab-like legs emerge from Skur's mouth. But before anything else can happen, a neighbor calls out and Skur runs off. Justice Department attorney Roy Cohn (David Moreland) calls Dales in and orders him to amend his report and eliminate Skur's name in the interests of national security. While investigating yet another homicide, Dales receives a mysterious message to meet someone at a bar; the contact turns out to be a young State Department official named Mulder (Dean Aylesworth), who warns Dales that Skur and two other men are not Communists but patriots and victims of "xeno-transplantation," surgery to graft another species into the body, a procedure Nazi doctors experimented with during the war. Dales is called into a meeting with FBI director Hoover (David Fredericks), who cryptically tells him that we must do the things even our enemies are ashamed to do to ensure our survival. Dales, Mulder, and a third man arrange a meeting with Skur, who is captured by Mulder and his accomplice, and Dales walks away with nothing. It's the end of the case for him, and he doesn't hear of Skur again for 38 years, until



In "Travelers," Mulder visits retired FBI agent Arthur Dales (THE NIGHT STALKER's Darren McGavin), who worked on X-files in the past.

Mulder knocks on his door.

"Travelers," like "Unusual Suspects," is filler, but unlike "Unusual Suspects," it's not particularly entertaining. The episode's visuals are outstanding, making this, at least, a joy to watch. But, the story is paper-thin. Arthur Dales is not an intriguing character, although he has some resonance as a possible reflection of a future Mulder. Frederic Lane is fine as the younger Dales, but that's not saying much, since the part is the typical one of a young, naive agent initiated into the dark, clandestine byways of his job. And if you're going to bring in Darren McGavin, don't use him in a minor role where he mostly narrates! Bill Mulder is equally dull. This episode, with its historical characters (Cohn and Hoover) and its crustacean-like alien parasites, comes off like a reject from DARK SKIES, with a bit of Heinlein thrown in for good measure. The revisionist history does a disservice to the real-life people who stood up for their rights in the early 1950s and suffered blacklisting, imprisonment, and stress-induced illness and death. It's okay: they weren't Communists—they had aliens inside them! The use of historical characters was a cheap device on DARK SKIES, and considering how everyone considered DARK SKIES an X-FILES rip-off, the irony is pathetic. Hoover and Cohn come off as mere mouthpieces justifying the conspiracy's "ends justify the means" mentality. The scenes when the alien emerges from Skur's mouth are technically expert, but repulsive and nonsensical, since an autopsy on one of the afflicted men reveals the creature is stitched to the internal organs—but then we see Skur's parasite exiting freely through his mouth and entering Michel's. How come it doesn't eat Skur's organs as it eats those of the other

with helping organize the chaos, especially the last minute second-unit demands which crop up while having to prepare three shows at once. Tony Wolgemuth does many of the illustrations used as the basis for the shop's designs. Leeann Podavin and Geoff Redknapp, who have come up through the ranks, have been co-keying episodes with Lindala, alternating with one another in preparing the episodes for filming.

"I find we're lucky," said Lindala. "There aren't a lot of artists available up here that are knowledgeable in makeup effects, but I think because of the lack of resource in comparison to L.A., the people who are here are really well rounded. They have to oversee all the processes on their own and have to become proficient at all the processes on their own as opposed to the kind of specialization of all the shops down there."

Lindala's work was nominated for an Emmy for the fourth season episode called "Leonard Betts." "That was a really fun episode, directed by Kim Manners—zany, zany stuff," said Lindala. The episode featured a man who was composed of cancer, so that his physiomy was different, and his makeup was based on cancer cells. The character needed to ingest cancer from other people to continue on and in order to exercise his incredible ability to regenerate himself like a salamander does in nature. In the beginning of the show, his head gets cut off and then he regenerates himself. Towards the end of the show, he births himself out of his own mouth.

"Of course, being television, we don't get into the full, complete sequence," noted Lindala, "but one really fun element at the beginning of it, he flips back his head and screams this wide mouth scream; his throat bulges, and this new head—this protoversion of himself, this white gelatinous sort of makeup, a veiny version of himself—comes squeezing out of his mouth and screams like a newborn child. That was probably the biggest advancement that we had made."

Additionally, Lindala enjoyed inserting radio controlled mechanisms into the Betts piece. "We did four-way eye movement and some expression in his brow. That was [a scene] where we got to hold on [the makeup] for a minute, and the movement worked really well. There was a wider shot—so it's just sort of subtly inferred—you see his eyes roll and come back down looking more forward as his second head comes out of his mouth, and he is able to watch it himself."

Lindala enjoys developing new things and working more and more with animatronics and servo-motors. He has been behind a number of the creature builds for the show, including the bug creature named Pinkus working for the Final Side Telemarketing Company in "Foiles Adieu," the spi-

“The show has done wonders for me. It's given me a chance to assemble a team of talented artists. We had a blast.”

—Makeup Artist Toby Lindala—



Lindala's work on THE X-FILES television series led to the feature *DISTURBING BEHAVIOR* (above, with Lindala seen at left) for veteran X-FILES director David Nutter.

der in "Travellers" ("You don't end up seeing a whole lot of it," he wilyly observes), the cable-controlled tentacles for "Schizo Jennie" that wraps around Mulder's legs, as well as a radio-controlled version of the character of Esther for "Kill Switch."

Lindala's crew uses foam latex whenever they have to have that security in application and maintenance or in active movement, but whenever they can get away with it, they use gelatin and have been experimenting with silicon.

Because the crew is constantly under the gun in terms of television schedule, they have sometimes worked with materials that they were still developing their use of, and that were actually just being developed technically by their manufacturers. One example Lindala remembers was "this wonderful silicon by Circle-K called XP-245. [Circle K] were great, in giving terms of technical advice and all, but we got this silicon sent out and did some tests with it and

were plasticizing it to varying degrees to get the amount of stretch we needed from it. It's wonderful stuff. If it's correctly tinted, it reads like flesh on camera. We tested it real close to his skin tone, only had to freckle it on the surface, so it read the light beautifully. But the first few runs, it was difficult to get the silicon to do what we needed it to do. We were trying out different things, varying degrees of plasticizers, vary degrees of catalysts. We were calling down for technical advice.

"We had been working with some of their CK series, which were their regular silicones, we realized that the XP on the name meant that it was part of their experimental series which were just being developed, so they sent us out new catalysts going, 'Well, if that's not working, try this one. Maybe throw in a little bit.... Try this catalyst with this plasticizer, try these different ratios,' and we told them we had to have a good skin out in two days for camera. It was exciting to develop it, and it worked out wonderfully, but oh, the stress."

Although Fox's standards and practices division does not appear to be as uptight as those of the other networks, the show receives cautionary notices about what is and is not acceptable to air, which are regularly delivered to the production office. Fortunately, Lindala finds that this has not created much difficulty for his crew. "We get to look at the notes sent over, but generally we do it all anyway," Lindala related. "Chris will work it out with [the network censors] in cuts. "There have been some episodes where he had to totally revamp concepts because they thought them a little too much, but I think the popularity that the show has achieved speaks for itself, and there is a reason for the 9 o'clock time slot. A lot of times we'll shoot it, and we won't pull back on it, and if we have to we'll cut it into a quick little sequence, but at least we don't water down the reality of it, which I find really satisfying."

Lindala and his crew did not work on the X-FILES movie, which was filming while they were still shooting the final episodes of the fourth season. Now that the series is moving to Los Angeles, Lindala will be concentrating on MILLENIUM as well as embarking on other projects: Lindala's shop has done some episodes of *POLTERGEIST*, and they just completed his first feature, *DISTURBING BEHAVIOR*, for director David Nutter, who had recruited Lindala during the first season of X-FILES. Looking back on his accomplishments for X-FILES, Lindala said, "The show has done wonders for me. It's given me a chance to assemble a team of talented makeup effects artists up here. It's been like a rollercoaster ride. It's wonderful being there, and Chris was wonderful to work with. We just had a blast." □

X-FILES

MISSING MAKEUP EFFECTS

Too little is not enough for effective big screen terror.

On the small screen THE X-FILES is known for its shadowy, suggestive horror, stirring up fear without showing too much. But when the franchise made the jump to movie theatres, there were some who felt it showed too little. This is puzzling, since the \$65-million budget should have afforded enough horrific effects imagery to fill the big screen. In fact, there was far more shot than was actually shown, and much of it was done by the KNB Effects Group.

Howard Berger (the "B" in KNB) recalled that, when the filmmakers first approached them, "What they were asking for is stuff we had done a million times before, and I didn't think it was going to be very difficult. That was my first feeling," he added with a laugh. "It escalated from there. KNB was hired originally to do all these background bodies in these ice ponds in the film. Then we started to do more important things, like this sequence where Scully and Mulder come across this dead fireman corpse. ADI [Amalgamated Dynamics, another effects company] originally did it, but there was some kind of mix-up, and we ended up redoing it. It's this weird kind of translucent jelly body, which kept going through an evolution during the course of shooting the movie. Things kept changing, with input from [director] Rob Bowman and Dan Sackheim, who's one of the producers, and from Chris Carter."

Berger says having to keep these three key people pleased all the time was a challenge, but one he appreciated: "I ended up having a really good time with it, because it made me stay on my toes and be super-creative, and keep trying to come up with new things that we hadn't seen before. The fireman was the first hero piece we did for the film. We ended up doing about 40 background bodies, about 20 that were still in humanoid form, and 20 that were in a stage of decomposition. We went back and forth, matching stuff ADI did. It was kind of fun working with them, and what's nice is their shop is right up the street from ours."

The construction of the fireman corpse required a material that proved very tricky to work with. Berger recalled: "We found a translucent and transparent silicone that was super touchy. It's inhibited by a million and one



Mulder searches for something scary in the X FILES film. He should have looked on the cutting room floor, where most of the effects ended up.

things, which means it won't set up, and you pop your mold and you just have a bunch of goo. It started with the kind of clay we used for sculpting—it couldn't have any sulfur in it. And the molds we had to make had to be compatible with the silicone, and we had to keep everything clean. In the film, there was an autopsy done on this body, and it was all gooey and squishy. It was fun to make it, but it was really a nightmare, and we kept reshooting it."

He added, "I went in to the show thinking, *Okay, we'll just do some bodies—big deal.* But Dan Sackheim really wanted to stretch the bounds, and I appreciate that. We tried to do everything in our power that we could to give him everything he wanted. He was real specific about things. I thoroughly enjoyed my working relationship with him, and with Chris Carter and Rob Bowman. It was very collaborative. I had never worked with the three of them before. We had done some things here and there on the series, things that Toby [Lindala], the Vancouver makeup artist, was unable to get to because of his schedule or whatever."

Those stretched boundaries, however, snapped back, in the editing room. "I thought we did some really great stuff," said Berger. "We did this one piece that was really groundbreaking that is in the trailer. Mulder comes across this big block of ice in the ship, and wipes away frost to reveal this Neanderthal frozen in the block. Some stuff had been done before, but ultimately nobody was happy with it, so we realized we needed to make it really

look like it's submerged in ice and works on the same physical level as that. So we first did a sculpture of this kind of desiccated Neanderthal, and took a mold of that, pulled the silicone mold off with the sculpture still intact, and we carved it down into a skeleton of that character, a little alien in the belly. Then we took a mold of that, and cleaned out all the molds. Then we ran in clear urethane, first into the skeletal version, popped that, painted it up, then put that into the first mold of the desiccated Neanderthal, which was all locked in with interlocking keys. Then we ran that with water-clear urethane, and popped that, and we had a perfect translucent, transparent Neanderthal that you could see all these different layers."

The next part of the construction became even more time-consuming.

Berger reported: "We submerged it into, I think it was, hundreds of gallons of the clear urethane. We could only pour four inches every four hours, because of the heating process. We found, doing tests, that if we poured a big lump sum all at once, it would heat so much it would just crack inside. So we had guys working all night long. Actually, our key moldmaker, Brian Ray, was the guy behind all that; he figured out how to do it, and masterminded it, and was the guy here at night. But it turned out to be a beautiful piece. On the last day of shooting, I sat there and told Dan Sackheim, Rob Bowman and the editors, 'If this is not in the movie, I'm going to kill all of you!' They kept going, 'That's the world's biggest paperweight.' And I'm like, 'And expensive, too.' It cost a hell of a lot of money, and it took us like nine weeks to build."

Ultimately, the scene was not used in the film itself. Berger, who was less than satisfied with the way his work appeared—or rather did not appear—in either the film or the various publicity tie-ins, was fairly vocal with his displeasure and wanted a chance to show viewers what they had missed. Word came down from Carter's 10-13 productions, however, that no images of KNB's work were to be released to the press. "The only thing I can think of," said Berger, searching for an explanation, "is that some of the stuff that wasn't used in the film will be used in the series. They came under a lot of flack, because nothing's in the movie."

Douglas Eby and Jay Stevenson

victims? Michel as the partner—i.e., the X-FILES Red Shirt—is killed off, for no other reason than to create a shocking moment.

Continuity is unforgivably sloppy. Mulder did not learn about his father's involvement in the conspiracy until "Anasazi," yet now we're told he learned about it several years earlier. He didn't learn about Nazi scientist involvement until "Paper Clip," but now that's invalid, too. In "Shapes," Mulder informs Scully that Hoover opened the X-Files in 1946, but in "Travelers" a records clerk tells Dales she put the files in "X" because she ran out of room in the "U" drawer. Mulder wears a wedding ring (and he's smoking!) although he clearly lives in the same bachelor apartment he has always occupied. Duchovny stated he wore the ring intentionally to create speculation, but this back-end development makes you want to rip your hair out in frustration. You can see Duchovny looking for something to do, since nothing is there for him in the script—so he wears the ring, smokes and keeps smoothing back his hair to give an impression of youthful nervousness. The hair-smoothing gesture is far from subtle—they don't want us to miss that ring.

The ending is morally unfeasible. Mulder wonders how Skur escaped, and Dales speculates that someone might have let him go in order to someday expose the crimes committed against Skur and others. One last flashback shows Bill Mulder releasing Skur. But what kind of charity is this? Skur is a victim, but he's also a killer who will continue to kill, thanks to what was done to him. Bill Mulder is willing to let more murder be done in the vague hope this will expose the conspiracy, but he evades all responsibility by refusing to be involved in that exposure himself. The portrait painted of this man in earlier episodes has never been pretty (he permitted his daughter to be abducted; he treated his son with contempt) but this action is so vile one begins to think he deserved what happened to him in "Anasazi." It is beyond comprehension that Dales and Mulder—especially Mulder—also seem to think this action is justified. The real x-file this season is why the writers are so insistent on draining from Mulder everything that made him not only sympathetic, but admirable.

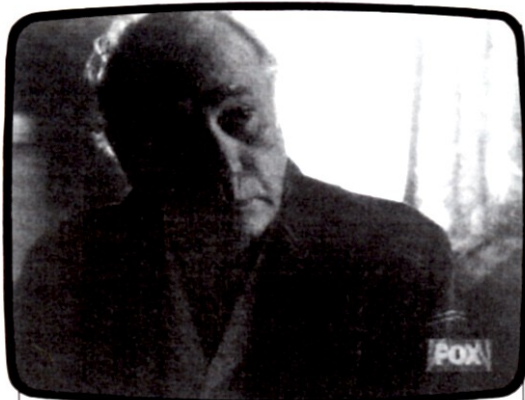
"Somewhere Marcia Clark weeps, but you still haven't got a weapon."
—Marty

MIND'S EYE ★★1/2

4/19/98. Editor: Casey O. Rohrs. Written by Tim Minear. Directed by Kim Manners.

The Wilmington, Delaware police find a young woman named Marty Glenn (Lili Taylor) at a motel murder scene and book her for the crime. Detective Pennock (Blu Mankula) asks Mulder and Scully for help on the case, because the circumstances are so peculiar. Marty is blind, yet allegedly she took a 60-mile cab ride to the scene and carved a precise C-shaped cut in the victim. Mulder is dubious that

In "Mind's Eye," Mulder visits Marty in jail; he believes the blind woman's presence at a crime scene was due to a psychic link with a killer.



Darren McGavin's role in "Travelers" turns out to be a minor one, which mostly consists of his narrating past events seen in flashback.

Marty is guilty, but Det. Pennock says he feels Marty—who has a long rap sheet for minor crimes—has a "sixth sense" that lets her see in the dark, like a bat.

Mulder and Scully interrogate Marty. She is hostile, uncooperative and sarcastic, and refuses to confess. Mulder feels drawn to her and is convinced that she is innocent. Scully is not so sure. A lie detector test confirms Mulder's suspicions that Marty is hiding something, although an eye exam confirms she cannot see physically. Mulder notices her pupils suddenly contract and suspects Marty can "see," but in her mind's eye, not with her real eyes. Meanwhile, a recently paroled convict named Gotts (Richard Fitzpatrick) is arranging a drug deal, but takes some time out to harass a woman at a bar. Marty "sees" the action through the Gotts' eyes and calls him at the bar to warn him off. After she is released from jail without being charged, she "sees" the man murder the woman in an alley. She rushes to the scene and when apprehended by police, claims to have committed both murders. Mulder asks Marty who she is protecting, but she won't say. He tells her he believes it's the man who murdered her mother when she was pregnant with Marty, an attack that caused Marty's blindness. Gotts tracks down Marty and she "sees" herself as he sees her and she knows she is in danger from this man. Tests on the blood from a glove Scully found at the first murder scene confirm Gotts is Marty's father. She is to be moved to a safe location and goes home to pack with Det. Pennock, but suddenly cold-cocks Pennock and grabs his gun. She knows her father is coming to kill her. When he enters the apartment, she shoots him point-blank. This time she is guilty of a homicide.

"Mind's Eye" is strikingly reminiscent of third season's "Oubliette," but since the new episode doesn't have the specific connection "Oubliette" drew between Lucy and Mulder's sister Samantha, it doesn't touch the heart as deeply. Mulder's sympathy for Marty blossoms too quickly and seems forced, although his affinity for troubled young women is not without precedent and thus ultimately believable. Scully is pretty much on auto-pilot; although she uncovers some valuable evidence, another character could have done the same without changing the story. In fact, Mulder and Scully don't have much effect on the story whatsoever, which really is about Marty and the torment she undergoes when her father, after many years, is freed from jail and she is forced to see, through his eyes, his unrestrained cruelty and violence. She makes the choice to go to prison herself rather than return there through the eyes of her father. At least it will be her experience, not her father's. The price to take control of her own life, though, is pre-meditated murder, so Marty is not without stain herself. Unfortunately, the story makes the choice too obvious for Marty (and too easy for the audience) by presenting Gotts as such an unregenerate slime that all you can think is that he deserves what he gets. It's vigilante justice.

The admirable actress Lili Taylor graces this episode with her heartfelt portrayal, modulating from super-tough to super-vulnerable in a blink. It is she who makes "Mind's Eye" truly memorable. The work of director Manners and cinematographer Ransom is also highly effective, particularly in the distorted shots where Marty sees through her father's eyes. The shot where from her father's POV she "sees" herself shoot him is masterful in conception and execution.

"As much as I have my faith, Father, I am a scientist, trained to weigh evidence. Science only teaches us how, not why."
—Scully

ALL SOULS ★

4/26/98. Editor: Heather MacDougall. Teleplay by Frank Spotnitz & John Shiban. Story by Billy Brown & Dan Angel. Directed by Allen Coulter.

"All Souls" unfolds in flashback, as Scully confesses to a priest her involvement in a case with religious implications. A week ago, Father McCue (Arnie Walkder) asked Scully to help out a family that had recently lost their adopted daughter, Dara, under puzzling circumstances that can't be explained by the police. Father McCue feels that because Scully had suffered a similar loss, she would be the right person to look into the death. Dara (Emily Perkins), a wheelchair-bound adolescent, had just been baptized. That night her father saw her walking down the street during a violent storm and when he went after her, found her dead in a kneeling position of prayer, her eyes burned out. Scully asks Mulder to find Dara's adoption records. They reveal Dara was a quadruplet. A priest named Father Gregory (Jody Racicot) arrives at a local psychiatric institution to take home the girl



Marty Glenn (Lili Taylor) is discovered by police as she is cleaning up a crime scene. But she's blind, so how could she have committed a murder?

he has arranged to adopt, a disturbed youngster named Paula Koklos. He is prevented from taking Paula by her new social worker, Aaron Starkey (Glenn Morshower), who says all the paper work isn't finished. That night, Paula is killed the same way Dara was. Scully arrives the next morning and notices an inverted cross in Paula's room. She autopsies Paula and notices bony protrusions on the clavicle that she thinks look like the stubs of angel wings. During the autopsy, she is dumfounded by a vision of Emily on the autopsy table, whispering, "Mommy, please..." Scully and Mulder talk to Father Gregory at his church, the Church of St. Peter the Sinner. Scully is shaken by Father Gregory's assertion that there is a struggle going on between good and evil that puts "the messengers" in danger; she feels he's talking directly to her. Mulder thinks Gregory is a dangerous wacko; Scully has her doubts. They track down the third sister, but she, too, has been killed. They arrest Father Gregory, who tells them he is trying to save the girls from the Devil, but Scully believes it's not the Devil who wants the girls. Left alone in the interrogation room,



Gregory is visited by Starkey, who begins to radiate a light so intense it burns Gregory to death. When Scully leaves the police station later that night, she experiences a remarkable vision: a man (Tracy Eloffson) with four faces standing in a blaze of light. Shaken, she goes to Father McCue, who tells her the story of the Seraphim and their disfigured half-divine children, the Nephilim, who weren't meant to be and whose souls must be called home before the devil gets them. But what Scully saw was a figment of her imagination, he says. Scully, with Mulder's help, finds the fourth girl but when the blazing man appears, the girl pulls away from Scully, who suddenly sees Emily once more pleading to be let go. Scully lets go of Emily's hand—and the last girl, like her sisters, dies, her eyes burned out. At least the Devil has been thwarted. Scully feels entirely responsible for the last girl's death and tearfully ponders its meaning.

With its trip into blatant religiosity, "All Souls" comes off like a bad episode of MILLENNIUM. The great director Ernst Lubitsch once told another great director, Billy Wilder, not to spell things out for the audience, as if they were idiots, just put two and two together and let the audience add it up. "All Souls" violates this sage piece of advice, starting with the teaser, when Dara confronts the angel on the street. As her soul is taken, the camera pans to the right and stops to linger on a telephone pole that forms a cross. Uh oh, this must be a sequel to "A Christmas Carol" and "Emily."

Scully's woe is interminable; she is in tears practically throughout. And it's all for a child for whom it is impossible to feel anything, thanks to



In a MILLENNIUM-type episode, Scully has a vision of a blazing Seraphim who has come to Earth to reclaim half-divine offspring of angels.

tells her he's following someone, but then we see him enter a porn movie theater. While Mulder's consumption of pornography has served in the past to symbolize his isolation and lack of significant relationships, here it's just a tasteless joke, making him look like an insensitive creep while Scully chastely suffers on and on. This is gender stereotyping to an extreme degree in a show that used to transcend the stereotypes. And while Mulder has never been a believer in organized, Western religion, the scorn with which he treats an emotionally fragile Scully is disgraceful, especially when he turns away from the case because she's too involved (say, isn't that why Father McCue wanted her on this case?). This is advice Mulder would never take from anyone, including Scully.

Father McCue is the most annoying priest on television.

The cinematography and the special effects are outstanding, particularly in the use of blinding light to obscure the angel and the revelation of the angel's four heads.

"What happened to your hand?" —Skinner
"Terrorist lie detector." —Mulder

THE PINE BLUFF VARIANT ★★1/2

5/3/98. Editor: Lynne Willingham. Written by John Shiban. Directed by Rob Bowman.

Skinner and Scully observe from a van Mulder and other agents staking out a park where a known domestic terrorist named Jacob Haley (Daniel von Bargen) has arranged to meet a contact. The two suspects connect, an envelope is passed, Haley leaves (with Mulder in pursuit) and the second man collapses, his flesh eaten away. Scully is so alarmed for Mulder's safety that she runs after him, and to her shock, sees him letting Haley drive off in a car. The next day she confronts Mulder about his actions, but he shrugs off her inquiries. They both attend a meeting of a joint FBI/CIA group that is tracking Haley's movements. Haley is second-in-command of an extremist right-wing group led by one Arthur Bremer (Michael McRae). Tests show the man in the park was killed by a biotoxin that has not yet been identified. Meanwhile, Mulder continues to act suspiciously: Scully sees him drive off with Haley to a meeting where he tells him he identifies with his group's goals, but Haley distrusts him. Scully follows Mulder but she is forced off the road and escorted into the presence of Skinner and U.S. Attorney Leamus (Sam Anderson). She's told that Mulder is working undercover, that he was approached by Bremer's group after he spoke at a UFO conference and denounced government cover-ups. Mulder is threatened by Haley and physically coerced by Haley's companion, the Gimp (Armin Moatter), who breaks his pinky. In Ohio, the patrons and staff of a movie theater are found dead, their flesh

eaten just like the man in the park. Scully arrives to investigate.

Back in Washington, she tells Mulder she knows he's undercover; outside Mulder's apartment someone is listening to their conversation with a laser beam listening device. Mulder tells Skinner the terrorist group is planning to hit a bank; he is given fake microfiche files with Federal Reserve schedules to pass to Haley. Scully learns that the deadly pathogen is a form of streptococcus which has been coated with a synthetic protective covering which gives them an adhesive quality; dermal contact activates the contagion. But Scully finds the germ is similar to but much more advanced than one developed at the Army's Pine Bluff facility in the 1960s, leading her to believe that that program continued even after the government officially cancelled it. Where this version came from, no one knows. Bremer and Haley force Mulder to wear a mask and join the terrorist group in the bank robbery. Afterwards, when Scully recognizes Mulder on the bank's videotape, thanks to his taped finger, the FBI rushes to the bank. Scully realizes that the real purpose of the robbery was to expose people once more to the germ—another test. Back at terrorist headquarters, Bremer forces Haley and Mulder to their knees. He plays the tape of Mulder and Scully talking—Haley realizes he's been duped. Bremer lets Haley go and orders the Gimp to shoot Mulder, but then he suddenly shoots the Gimp and orders Mulder to get out of there. Mulder realizes Bremer is a government operative and rushes back to the bank, where he confronts Skinner and Leamus. He accuses Leamus of knowing all along about the biotoxin and the tests. Leamus tells Haley sometimes it's his job to protect people from knowing the truth. Shortly after Haley drives off, his car goes off the road: he is the latest victim of the biotoxin.

The plot of "The Pine Bluff Variant" is one you might see on any cop or action/suspense show, and after five years of conspiracy betrayals, the ending is not much of a surprise. The episode's main flaw is the red herring of Scully's suspicions at the beginning. It's inconceivable that she, as Mulder's partner, would not be told that he is on an undercover assignment—what she doesn't know is precisely what could get him in trouble, as it almost does. Nor would Mulder ever throw in with terrorists, so this isn't remotely suspenseful for the audience. The writers must have realized how silly this was, since Scully learns Mulder's true mission by the end of act one. However, thanks to Rob Bowman's direction, Willingham's crisp editing, Mark Snow's music (Snow's metallic tick-tock expertly jacks up the tension) and a number of exciting set-pieces for Mulder, it's an absorbing hour of entertainment. The scene where Haley interrogates Mulder while the Gimp bends back Mulder's pinky until he finally breaks it is especially gripping. It's not often we see our heroes hurt in such a startling and immediate way. The bank robbery scene and the execution scenes are also well staged. Duchovny does an excellent job

In "The Pine Bluff Variant," a terrorist group dons monster masks during a bank heist that turns out to have more than robbery as its motive.



Mulder's undercover identity is found out when tries to investigate a group of anti-government terrorists in "The Pine Bluff Variant."

the manipulative dreariness of those two earlier episodes. "All Souls" might have worked if the writers had handled the story more delicately; for instance, if they had made this a regular case, instead of having Father McCue, with all the tact and grace of the bull in the china shop, request Scully's assistance; and if Scully had not seen visions of Emily. If Scully had released the fourth girl's hand without seeing Emily, the more metaphorical treatment might created a true sense of pathos. But it's probably a lost cause, since this is a continuation of a storyline that failed the first time around to evoke any true emotion. This notion that Scully has been "chosen" to save children was interesting back in "Revelations," but it's getting ridiculous, especially since it now means that she has to let them go to their deaths to "save" them. This is such a dreadful burden of guilt to put on Scully and a terrible way to create "drama" and "conflict" for her. Gillian Anderson is fine, delivering all the tears and quivering lip you could ask for, but what a waste of an excellent actress who has traveled down this tear-stained route far too many times. Besides, when is Scully going to admit she is not just chosen, but downright psychic?

Mulder is treated disrespectfully. When we first see him, he's in a phone booth talking to Scully. He

X-FILES

DARK MUSIC

From ambient sound design to Mahleresque melody.

By Randall D. Larson

Although he began scoring television in 1976, it's only recently that Mark Snow has received acclaim as the composer for THE X-FILES and its offspring, MILLENIUM. Snow's ambient music for both series has become as much a part of them as the characters of Mulder, Scully, and Frank Black.

"After the first year, I've had complete leeway. I can do whatever the hell I want!" Snow said of his style for THE X-FILES. "Musically, the show has evolved from being more ambient, sound-design, supportive music to really getting into some melodic music in a dark, Mahleresque style. What is great is I can go back and forth. There's always a combination of the two. I just did a show that has a lot of flash-back-dream sequences, where it's just all very atonal, avant-garde, sound-design and accents and wonderfully weird combinations of sound and music. And then it goes back into Mahler or Bruckner or late Beethoven!"

Snow composes original music for each episode—there is no re-use of cues, no themes for Scully or Mulder or other characters. Snow prefers to compose for each episode's given situation, maintaining a consistently ambient undercurrent of eeriness and discomfort without sharing motifs for characters or events. "I create a theme for the situation," Snow said. "Of all of these shows, there's only been one where I've used the Main Title theme, and that was just for a brief moment at the end of 'Jose Chung's From Outer Space,' which was sort of a spoof of the series."

Snow gets anywhere from three to five days to score each episode. "The hardest part of the process is the beginning, figuring out the palette of sounds and instruments, and doing that first big cue," he said. "Everything after that is somewhat related. I usually write Act 4 first. After that's done, the whole score starts falling into place."

As the series evolved over its five seasons, Snow's music has similarly grown from subtle synths to complex orchestrations and highly-textured tonalities. "The show started off with more of a minimal



Composer Mark Snow's music as become as much a part of the series as Mulder and Scully.

sound design, synthesizer sustained, don't-make-trouble type of score: *Don't be noticed!*" Snow said. "And now I'm scoring under dialogue; there's sneaking-around-the-house music where I can really compose music rather than just a wash of sustained notes."

Snow adopts an amalgamation of modern and traditional scoring styles on THE X-FILES. "It seems that people respond to that music as if it's this really new approach, but it's really just the stuff that I've come to love over the years," he said. "Music by Varese, John Cage, all the real atonal stuff that maybe I like more than some other composers. I think that some of those sounds and techniques work great in suspense. I think that was more normal many years ago, and then with the advent of the electronic sounds it was just all these great samples and electronic sound-design things. I use both techniques on THE X-FILES, the 12-tone, atonal, aleatoric language, mixed in with a more traditional scoring approach. It's really wonderful to have all of these things in the arsenal."

Working with Chris Carter has been beneficial to Snow's musical development over

the course of the series. "During the first three years, he would come to the recording sessions every time he was in town," said Snow. "He was very much involved in every aspect of production. I mean, he could get a script from one of the writers, and it could be just brilliant, and he'd still rewrite the whole thing! He rewrites every script to some degree, some from top to bottom, others just certain portions, but he puts his mark on everything. He really wants to feel the sense of control that it's his show, his voice, his sound, his vision. If he could, he'd probably rewrite every score! In the beginning of year four, he started not coming to the scoring sessions or the playback of the music, and now he never comes. I may get a call from him every month or two, and it's 'Hey man, that score there was great! Ok man, I gotta go now, goodbye!'"

Even during the early seasons, however, Carter gave Snow a free hand in scoring and orchestrating the series as he saw fit. "He's loved the sound of my electronic stuff so much that every time I enter a new element, whether it's a new sound-design thing or a new English horn, bassoon, woodwind, French horn, brass, this or that—he just lets



Snow's approach to the series emphasized ambience and avoided specific motifs. But for the film he introduced themes for the sinister characters in the fifth season closer and carried them over to the film.

me do it."

Response from the show's millennia of fans shows they consider the music as important a component of THE X-FILES as do Snow and Carter. "The fan reactions to the music—every time there's an emotional piece, a melodic cue, that's what people react to the most," said Snow. "There have been shows last season that have had really moving scenes, and that's the music that got the most feedback."

Snow's music for Carter's spin-off series, MILLENNIUM, creates an even darker undertone. "When they first came to me about that, they said, 'We want this music to depict good and bad, Heaven and Hell, hope and horror.' And I asked, 'Which is it more of? Is it more dark than light, more horror than hope, or what?' They said 'Yeah.' So I thought of this single voice which turned out to be the solo violin, with this dark percussion accompaniment. The pilot is really just that, the sort of folksy, Celtic violin solos with the sleepy, dark, synthesizer-rumbling *moosh* stuff. I've gotten into more specific dark music with this Celtic contrast, whether it's solo violin or solo harp or solo woodwind, or woodwinds with harp or piano accompaniment. That seems to have worked well lately. They've really loved the idea of this simple honesty of that sound, and of course when there's horror you just have to do it."

Naturally, Snow composed the music to the X-FILES feature film. While no stranger to feature film scoring (he composed 1995's BORN TO BE WILD and recently scored David Netter's DISTURBING BEHAVIOR), Snow found the opportunity to translate his X-FILES music to the big screen a refreshing challenge. "Ninety percent of the score is big orchestra combined with electronics," said Snow. "It's a traditional sound with the orchestra, to an extent, but in a sharp contrast to the elec-

tronic stuff."

The scope of the movie is the biggest contrast with the TV show, according to Snow. "There are things in the movie that the TV show can and will never do," Snow said. "There are massive CGI effects quite appropriate for the big screen that they don't have the time or money to do for the series. But it's still a very dense, deep story, quite complicated."

The feature score afforded Snow the opportunity to delve into recurring themes and motifs much more than he was able to do in the series. Even his main X-FILES theme found multiple guises in the feature score. "The X-FILES theme was harmonized and orchestrated in different settings that never appeared on the TV show," said Snow. "The TV version is sort of a one-note pad with simple accompaniment. Now I've put different kinds of harmonization to it. It doesn't happen every place, but it happens enough that anyone who knows the theme would recognize it." Snow also created new themes for the film's more sinister characters, such as the Cigarette-Smoking Man and the Elders. "The last episode of the TV season had a lot of these themes in it," Snow said, to "introduce some of the movie music."

The tonality of Snow's music—which will be available on a score-only CD shortly after the release of the song "soundtrack" CD—remains appropriately dark. "The great thing about the TV series is that when we have these stand-alone episodes, some of which verge on black comedy, I can do a lot of cute things with the music. The big shows, the mythical-conspiracy-cover-up shows are fairly drab, so there's not much room for anything but the real dark approach." The feature film carries on that approach. "I wanted to continue the effect and the honesty of the music from the series, and have it modulate to the big screen," said

Snow, who wrote some 75 minutes of music for the film, although he would have preferred less. "I'm actually hoping to convince these people to take some of it out!" he said, before the release. "In a feature, you don't need the constant reminder that something's going on, with accents and music all over the place. For better or for worse, though, the legacy of the music of THE X-FILES has always been: play lots of music!"

Snow pre-recorded all the electronic tracks, which were then transferred to a digital 48-track mixing machine. The symphonic music was recorded separately with an 85-piece orchestra. The synths and symphs were then mixed together to create the film's final musical sound which was, in turn, merged with the dialogue and sound effects tracks to create the film's final soundtrack. The orchestral music features lots of percussion and bass instruments, capturing the dark approach needed of the score. "The percussionists were all over the place—glass and marimbas and all kinds of crazy instruments," said Snow. "The combination of the ambient electronic stuff and the orchestra should be really spectacular."

With the feature film completed, Snow looks forward to a return to the TV series in August. "I've been very lucky because the quality of X-FILES and MILLENNIUM is so good, in general, that it's like doing a mini-feature every week," he said. "I'd like to graduate some day to where I'm not doing episode TV, and I'm doing three, four, five movies a year, where I could really expand my career from film to film. But if you look at the graph of my career, it's a very steady build and then it sometimes plateaus, but it never dips. I'm not talking necessarily quality projects, but just working. There was one time a few years ago where I had a three-month period of no work, and that's been it. That's pretty good." □

of conveying Mulder's pain and stress while attempting to maintain a facade of complicity with men who are ready to kill him at any moment. Anderson doesn't have as much fun in this episode but she is otherwise fine in a conventional part.

"Monsters? I'm your boy."

—Mulder

FOLIE A DEUX

★★★

5/10/98. Editor: Casey O. Rohrs. Written by Vince Gilligan. Directed by Kim Manners.

Gary Lambert (Brian Markinson) is an employee of a direct-marketing vinyl siding firm called VinylRite located in Oak Brook, Illinois. Gary is terrified of his boss, Greg Pincus (John Apicella), who he believes is not a man, but a man-sized insect-like creature that buzzes and flits around the office and sucks the life out of people, turning them into zombies. But he's the only one who can see the insect-man; to everyone else he's simply Mr. Pincus. After Gary sends a taped message to a local radio station warning of the creature that stalks VinylRite and demanding the tape be played 24 hours a day, Skinner tells Mulder and Scully to make a threat assessment on the company, which is being careful ever since an employee at another branch threatened people with a gun several years ago.

Mulder is annoyed by what he considers a time-waster of an assignment and tells Scully not to bother going—he'll take care of it himself. He talks to Pincus, listens to the tape and decides whoever sent it is merely deranged. He asks Scully to look through the X-Files for a phrase heard on the tape, "hiding in the light," which is how Lambert believes Pincus disguises himself. Mulder then returns to VinylRite and walks right into a hostage situation: Gary is brandishing a high-powered rifle and has separated the "zombies" and Mr. Pincus from "the actual humans." He wants a cameraman to come in and reveal Mr. Pincus's true identity to the world: The FBI sends in the cameraman. Mulder pretends to be a job applicant, but his cover is blown when FBI Agent Rice (Roger R. Cross) uses Scully's cell phone to call him. Gary is about to kill Pincus on camera when Mulder intervenes. Gary begs him to turn around and look at Pincus and when he does, Mulder sees what Gary sees: a huge insect-like creature. Just then, the police crush through the wall and shoot Gary. The crisis is over, but Mulder is shaken by more than just being a hostage. He goes back to D.C., where he tells a worried Scully what he saw. She suggests that it was a hallucination brought on by the ordeal. Mulder returns to Illinois, and has shipped to Scully the body of a man killed by Gary during the hostage situation. She finds the corpse has deteriorated more than expected; Mulder says that's because he was already dead. At Gary's house, Mulder sees one of Pincus' "zombies" staring at him; she disappears but moments later drives away with Pincus. He traces Pincus to another VinylRite employee's home and

In "Folie a Deux," assistant Director Skinner (Mitch Pileggi) loses his patience with Mulder's claim that he is pursuing a monster disguised as a man.



After attacking a man he believes to be a monster in disguise, Mulder is confined to a psychiatric unit, where he is easy prey, in "Folie a Deux."

sees him bite her, but she accuses Mulder of being her attacker. Skinner arrives to investigate this, but when Mulder attacks Pincus, Skinner has him committed to a hospital psychiatric unit. Tied down by wrist restraints, Mulder is helpless to defend himself when the insect creature enters his room. Fortunately, Scully has just arrived to tell Mulder she found evidence of bite marks on the neck of the "zombie" in her autopsy bay. To her shock, she sees Mulder's nurse as a zombie and rushes to his room, shooting at something she sees in the dark. Back at the FBI, Scully is noncommittal in her report to Skinner, pronounces Mulder fit for duty, and then tells a waiting Mulder that she told the truth as best she knew it. Was it a "Folie a deux," a madness shared by two?

"Folie a Deux" is the scariest episode of the year. The insect creature, with its "now you see it, now you don't," herky-jerky movements and its buzzing sound, is a triumph for the special effects and post-production team. Even the casting for Pincus is just right. Apicella, with his round countenance, mild manner and high-pitched voice seems the soul of innocence, until he flashes a look of malevolence towards Mulder. Brian Markinson, is also wonderful as the nervous Gary. Kim Manners works in all sorts of tilted and skewed camera angles, often low shots, to demonstrate the mental instability of the characters while also keeping the audience off-balance. One of the best is a very low-angle shot of Mulder gazing down at Pincus' latest victim, oblivious to the bug-creature above him skittering across the ceiling and out the window. Another terrific moment is when Mulder first sees the insect: the lights sputter out in the room where Gary is holding the hostages and Mulder turns around, at Gary's insistence, to look at Pincus... and sees, in the darkness, the menacing form of the giant insect. In fact, any scene with the big bug is a real chiller; another nail-biter is when Pincus, behind Skinner's back, lets Mulder see his true insect form while he moves to attack Skinner, thus forcing Mulder to retaliate in a way that makes him look insane.

There's a nice metaphor at work in the script (and well realized in performance by the cast, aurally by the sound design and physically by the set design) of people caught in low-paying, soul-numbing jobs being little more than insect-type drones, anonymous workers in a buzzing, busy hive of a workplace. The tiny carrels could be the cells in a bee nest. No wonder Mr. Pincus likes to hide himself in such a setting. He probably feels right at home.

The script is structured in two parts, the first half dealing with Markinson's confrontation with the big bug, the second half dealing with Mulder's (and ultimately Scully's) realization. The second half is thus rather repetitive, but the insect is such a terrific monster that it carries the episode on its chitinous shoulders. This is one of the few times that Scully sees something out of the ordinary at the same time Mulder sees it, a rare moment of unity for them (especially this season). Unfortunately, there really is no question of

whether they are sharing a delusion or not, because the script pulls its punches in act three, when we see, from an objective angle, Pincus driving a car with one of his zombie victims in the passenger seat. Mulder is too far away behind the car for this to represent his POV. The loss of ambiguity dilutes the power of the episode, turning it into a big bug hunt. This narrative coddling keeps the episode from attaining true classic status; in the end, it simply isn't as horrifying as it should have been, because we know too much. Even so, the episode is so well realized that there is much to enjoy and be frightened by. That is one hell of a bug. Where is a can of "Die, Bug, Die!" when you need it?

"You know you're going places when the Assistant Director tidies up your office for you."
—Mulder

THE END

★★★

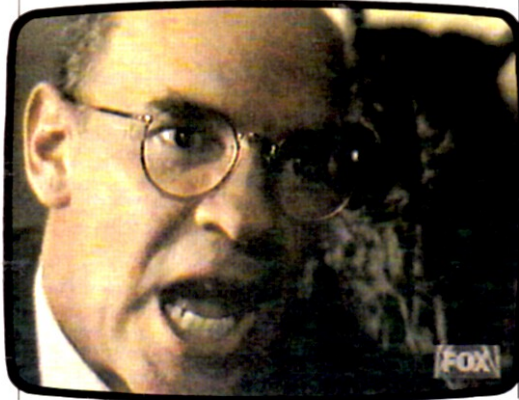
5/17/98. Editor: Heather MacDougall. Written by Chris Carter. Directed by R.W. Goodwin.

An important chess match between a Russian master and a 12-year-old boy named Gibson (Jeff Gulka) is taking place in a huge, sold-out arena in Vancouver, B.C. During the match, the boy hears some odd, electronic-like sounds. He looks around



The season finale, "The End," finds the Cigarette Smoking Man back in action, working for the conspirators who previously tried to kill him.

at the crowd but apparently sees nothing. He checkmates his opponent and pushes back in his chair just as the other man is shot with a high-powered rifle. Pandemonium erupts as the crowd rushes towards the exits. Meanwhile, in the Laurentian Mountains of Quebec, parachuters approach the remote cabin occupied by the Cigarette Smoking Man; after a brief gun battle and chase, he comes face to face with Krycek, who's been sent to bring him back. Mulder finds Skinner in his office, and after a brief discussion of Mulder's long-term plans, Skinner tells him about the assassination in Vancouver, adding that the shooter (Martin Ferraro), a former employee of the NSA, has been caught. Agent Spender (Chris Owens), who has been put in charge of the case by "outside forces," has specifically asked Mulder not to be put on the team. Mulder takes Skinner's hint and immediately intrudes on Spender's briefing. To Spender's annoyance, he points out something Spender hadn't noticed on the videotape, how the boy seems to have anticipated the shot pre-cognitively. One member of Spender's team is Agent Diana Fowley (Mimi Rogers), who knew Mulder in his early days in the Bureau and, like him, has an interest in the paranormal. At a psychiatric hospital, Gibson passes ESP tests with flying colors and also undergoes neurological tests. Mulder interrogates the shooter and suggests he will get immunity if he reveals what he knows about the boy. Meanwhile, the Well-Manicured Man (John Neville) and the First Elder (Don Williams) meet with the Cigarette Smoking Man. They want him to finish the botched assassination. Diana and Mulder discuss Gibson, then talk about the past five years



since Diana went to Europe to work on terrorism cases. Scully sees them talking and retreats to her car, calling Mulder from her cell phone. She has the results of Gibson's tests, and she also knows, thank to Frohike, that Fowley was once Mulder's "chickadee." At a meeting in Skinner's office, Scully states that Gibson has abnormal activity in an area of the brain called the "God Module." Mulder adds that Gibson may be the key to not only all human potential but all spiritual and paranormal phenomena, everything that's in the X-Files. He wants immunity for the shooter so he will reveal what he knows about the boy, and he is willing to risk the X-Files to ask the Attorney General for that immunity. Mulder informs the shooter he needs more information before immunity will be granted, and the man tells him the boy is "the missing link." Mulder realizes that this may refer to a link between humans and aliens, a theory Spender finds preposterous. Shortly afterwards, the shooter is shot through the slot in his door. Diana comes to relieve Scully from watching Gibson from the new safe location at a motel, but she is also shot. The Cigarette Smoking Man hands Gibson over to the Well-Manicured Man and Krycek; Mulder furiously assaults an outraged Spender, whom he holds responsible for the death of the shooter and the wounding of Diana. Back at Mulder's, Scully gets the news from Skinner that Diana is still alive, but there is talk of



The Cigarette Smoking Man delivers a 12-year-old boy with psychic powers (Jeff Gulka) to the Well-Manicured Man (John Neville) in "The End."

into the show, after the writers wrote themselves into a corner by pretending to kill him off.

And with all that Mulder and Scully have uncovered, why would the murder of a chess player and the abduction of Gibson's warrant a shut-down of the X-Files? If anything, the FBI should be beefing up Mulder's budget, considering what he and Scully have uncovered about Gibson. Or is Janet Reno part of the Conspiracy, too? Security is a joke. No guards are in sight monitoring the assassin's cell, and it's no surprise he's killed off so easily—although the Cigarette Smoking Man's threatening note on the packaging of a pack of Morleys is a clever way to signal the impending murder. At one point Mulder and Spender leave the shooter's cell without locking it. Gibson is guarded with minimal personnel who are easily overcome; Diana might as well be wearing a sign saying "shoot me" when she looks out the window of the motel room where the FBI is keeping Gibson. And where are Gibson's parents? We see them for a moment in the teaser, and Mulder speaks of them, but they otherwise absent, when they should play a prominent part of the story. Scully especially should be curious about them, after what she learned in "Christmas Carol" about Emily's parents.

Again, Mulder's characterization presents a problem. Although he's as close to his old self as he's come in a long time—smart, confident, sarcastic and able to perceive things others don't—he also suddenly believes in aliens again. One can get whiplash watching Mulder's beliefs ping-pong back and forth this season. The idea of putting Mulder through a period of self-questioning is a good one, but instead of a finely drawn portrait of a person experiencing a doubt so great it leads him down an unexpected road—i.e., skepticism—we've seen a Mulder who has been bounced from one end of the spectrum to the other without anything in between. Krycek's message and Scully's hypnotic regression in "The Red and Black" are not

Agent Spender (Chris Owens), the Cancer Man's alleged son, returns in "The End," heading a briefing regarding the assassination of a chess master.



sufficient explanation for Mulder's sudden return to his old theories. But since the show couldn't deal satisfactorily with a non-believing Mulder, it's probably for the best that he believes again. Don't question why, because there are no logical answers.

Mimi Rogers, who starred with David Duchovny in *THE RAPTURE*, is loved as Diana Fowley. Diana's affection for Mulder is touching, but she's not much of an agent; it's hard to believe someone as experienced as she would fall asleep on the job. And if she doesn't return next season, there seems little reason for her existence, other than to make Scully jealous and perhaps provide an oblique reference to the wedding ring Mulder sported in "Travelers." Shooting her is an easy way to get rid of her, even if she wasn't killed. The jealousy angle is played, thankfully, as subtly and low-key as possible, expressed in great deal through the editing of the reaction shots. And the foundation of the jealousy is not made explicit: professional jealousy, or is there something more? The show is teetering dangerously close to putting out in the open something that best be left bottled up. Gillian Anderson's performance in this episode is her best this year, which isn't surprising since she's finally been given something to do other than complain or cry. She is a model of restraint and the subtle mix of emotions that cross her face when she



A fan favorite, Nicholas Lea makes a reappearance as the ambiguous Krycek in "The End," now acting as the Well-Manicured Man's right-hand man.

returns to her car to call Mulder is beautifully done. Yet the unspoken rivalry between Scully and Diana makes it seem as if *THE X-FILES* has been afflicted by a case of creeping *ALLY MCBEAL*-ization. Put two women and one man in a room, and the two women are automatically jealous of each other. This kind of characterization shows lack of imagination, and if it works at all it's because of Gillian Anderson.

Spender is still a unpleasant snot, but then, he's meant to be that way. Chris Owens almost makes you like the guy or at least feel sorry for him whenever Mulder withers him with a glance or a choice line like "You're insulting me when you should be taking notes." The "I am your father," "what!" business between Spender and the Cigarette Smoking Man is grade-A, one hundred percent pure soap; alas, we're sure to get more of it in season six.

None of this dampens the possibilities opened up by "the God Module" or the final scene, where a benumbed, stunned Mulder contemplates the ruin of his dreams while Scully holds on to him, both to comfort and to be comforted. How ironic that this destruction comes only a couple of days after Mulder had told Skinner that his "long-term plans" were the X-Files, in which he hoped to find the truth. The episode opens big and wide with a glorious, ultra-cinematic crane shot that surveys the chess match arena from up high and then closes in on the two players and it comes full circle to two other players, Mulder and Scully. The machinations of "The End" are the biggest chess game of all, and even if Mulder and Scully have been checked for now, by no means are they checkmated. □



Mulder's former partner and old flame, Agent Diana Fowley (Mimi Rogers) discuss their present case and reminisce about old times in "The End."

closing the X-files and reassigning her and Mulder. Mulder realizes that this entire affair was planned from the beginning. The Cigarette Smoking Man stands in Mulder's darkened office, lighting a cigarette; he removes Samantha's case file from the cabinet. On his way out he sees Spender and tells him he is his son. Cut to firemen exiting an elevator and Mulder and Scully finding the charred remains of their office. The X-files have been destroyed.

"The End" is an effective, sometimes even moving, conclusion to a scattershot season. The destruction of Mulder's X-files represents a turning point, both for the show itself, which is now moving to Los Angeles for production, but also for Mulder, who has been emotionally lost at sea this season. Anything can happen now. It's a far superior cliffhanger to last season's "Gethsemane." Gibson's abilities also represent a wild card, an intriguing new factor, although how his mental powers are the key to everything in the X-files is not very clear.

The rest of the episode is a mixed bag. Krycek has been reduced to the Well-Manicured Man's errand boy and chauffeur (a curious job for a one-armed man!). John Neville, a great actor of stage and occasionally screen, gets to say "God!" a lot, while the Cigarette Smoking Man gets all the juicy lines. Why the change of heart about killing Gibson? Also, there's no explanation as to why the Consortium suddenly needs the Cigarette Smoking Man to do its dirty work, when he's messed up so many times before, to the point where they tried to assassinate him. It's just an excuse to get him back

X-FILES

REVIEW

An unexceptional episode blown up to the big screen

THE X-FILES

20th Century Fox Presents a Ten Thirteen Production. Directed by Rob Bowman. Written by Chris Carter; story by Carter & Frank Spotnitz. Produced by Chris Carter, Daniel Sackheim; executive producer, Lata Ryan; co-producer, Frank Spotnitz. Cinematography (Deluxe color, Panavision widescreen): Ward Russell. Music: Mark Snow. Editing: Stephen Mark. Production design, Christopher Nowak; art directors; Gregory Bolton, Hugo Santiago; set decorator, Jackie Carr. Sound (Dolby digital), Geoffrey Patterson. Special makeup effects by ADI and KNB, FX. Visual effects supervisor, Matt Beck; special effects coordinator, Paul Lombardi. Costumes, Marlene Stewart. 6/98. 120 minutes. Rated PG-13.

Fox Mulder.....David Duchovny
Dana Scully.....Gillian Anderson
Dr. Alvin Kurtzweil.....Martin Landau
Conrad Strughold.....Armin Mueller-Stahl
Jana Cassidy.....Blythe Danner
The Cigarette-Smoking Man.....William B. Davis
The Well-Manicured Man.....John Neville
Walter Skinner.....Mitch Pileggi
Darius Michael.....Terry O'Quinn
Barmid.....Glenn Headly
Langly.....Dean Haglund
Byers.....Bruce Harwood
Frohike.....Tom Braidwood

by Paula Vitaris

Blown up from 27 inches or so to 200 and pushed towards an action film mode, the X-FILES feature film loses the intimacy and stifling paranoia that made it such a unique television presence. Mercifully, there are no car chases or gunfights, but two explosions, alien monsters, and tons of special effects make it look like...well, a lot of other summer movies. Director Rob Bowman gives us plenty of eerily lit shots, off-kilter camera angles, obfuscatory editing, and creepy images, but whereas such stylish visuals are rare TV fare, they are common enough in features. The film's saving grace is the presence of Duchovny and Anderson, who effortlessly leap onto the big screen, creating a connection between the viewer and the screen that very few action films possess. More than anything else, this movie points out how the relationship between the partners has become the most important element of THE X-FILES, because the plot is now virtually one big MacGuffin; it could be anything, as long as it puts our heroes in peril and drives

them towards confessions and decisions. The proof of this is how the storyline is larded up with the same kind of plothes, coincidences and contrivances that have become a staple of the series—but they don't matter, do they, as long as we've got Mulder and Scully to keep us glued to the screen.

The movie starts off with a teaser about an alien monster and those pesky oil aliens lying in wait for thousands of years under the soil of North Texas. The scene shifts to a Dallas federal building, where Mulder and Scully are searching for a bomb, which goes off, supposedly killing an FBI bomb expert, a boy, and four firemen. A meeting between Mulder and Dr. Alvin Kurtzweil (Martin Landau) sends Mulder and Scully on a series of adventures to uncover the truth behind the bombing: something about aliens in the form of viruses who don't just want to enslave humans but to use them for gestation of...well, some kind of monster whose principal activity is tearing humans to pieces. There are also gazillions of virus-infected bees, one of which is stubborn enough to stick with Scully all



In the feature film version of THE X-FILES, Mulder somewhat fortuitously stumbles upon a brightly lit tunnel that takes him to an underground alien ship.

the way from Texas to Washington, D.C., where it stings her at the very moment Mulder is finally, after five years, about to kiss her. The movie winds up with a big action sequence as Mulder travels with one precious vial of vaccine to the Antarctic to rescue the abducted and infected Scully. Back in Washington, Mulder and Scully realize they must both continue on with their work, no matter what obstacles might be thrown in their way, and we learn that the X-Files have been reopened.

The movie is definitely a fun rollercoaster ride, and exposition is kept to a minimum. But we've been on this rollercoaster before; the storyline is patched together from any number of often superior TV episodes. And it is jury-rigged with all sorts of improbable situations. Mulder and Scully are assigned to the very team searching for a bomb the Syndicate hopes will go off without a hitch. They find it in a totally unexpected locale, thus saving hundreds of people from death and injury, but the film asks us to believe that a Justice Department pan-

el would find them at fault, when we know that they would be proclaimed heroes. Mulder gets to the middle of the Antarctic in record time (*who* is paying for this trip?) and then just happens to fall into the exact hole in the ground that will lead him to a frozen Scully. Amazingly, the vial of vaccine is not crushed to dust during Mulder's tumble. And then there's the miracle bee, which stings at the precise moment Mulder and Scully are to kiss. It's all the more offensive (and risible) because the scene, about what Mulder and Scully owe to each other and to their work, is so movingly written and performed. A beautifully wrought scene like this cries out to be ended as honestly as it was begun.

For all their vaunted investigative skills, Mulder and Scully are passive heroes. Each real move forward comes from information provided either by Kurtzweil or the Syndicate's Well-Manicured Man (the impressive John Neville). It's the latter who finally reveals the real intentions of the aliens and gives Mulder the coordinates of Scully's location and the vaccine that will save her (and destroy the alien-built system that holds her).

The portrayal of Scully in this film is a depressing one. On the surface, she is smart and dynamic—the scene where she barks orders to clear the building is a gem. But she only gets to do the fun stuff when Mulder is around. No one approaches *her* with juicy, secret information. And her scientific knowledge goes only so far as producer and writer Chris Carter wants it to go. For instance, during the bee-cornfield scenes, she never observes, as we would expect her to, that bees normally don't pollinate corn. And then she is literally put on ice for twenty min-

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The film degenerates into a Mulder-saves-Scully episode: within the alien lair, Scully's body is found by Mulder—entombed in some kind of cryosleep.



SIX-STRING SAM

Low-budget post-apocalypse flick does anime

By Craig D. Reid

What do you get when you cross *THE WIZARD OF OZ* with the surrealistic solitude of the *LONE WOLF AND CUB* films, add in the harrowing agony of Rutger Hauer's *HITCHER* and recombine it with the wild swordplay of Hong Kong's Fant-Asia films? I don't know, but the resulting progeny, the action-fantasy-adventure *SIX-STRING SAMURAI*, is waiting to blast your brain. You've got a Buddy Holly look-a-like main character, armed with a six-string guitar and samurai sword, who is searching for Lost Vegas and being chased by a Guns 'n' Roses Slash-like heavy metallar, while also battling the Spinach Monster, the Windmill God, the Russian Army and a variety of other rock-and-roll swordsman wanna-be's. Enough said?

Starring Hong Kong action film veteran Jeffrey Falcon and directed by newcomer Lance Mungia, this Palm Pictures film has been beating-up the competition at independent film festivals and the buzz on the Internet has already dubbed *SIX-STRING* as a cult classic. Not bad for a film that started out as weekend shoots on credit cards and ended up with a \$2-million budget, a theatrical release in September, a CD soundtrack by the Red Elvises, a comic book deal, and a string of MTV promotional videos shot this summer.

Falcon eagerly blurted, "It's totally wild, man. This Buddy Holly-esque character with cracked, taped up, horn-rimmed glasses with a six string on his back and a samurai sword kicks people's asses, and in the middle of a fight, stops to push up his glasses. It's [taking] the classic image of the nerd with glasses in school and making him the hero. What's more cool than that?"

Mungia added, "I wanted to do something ambiguous and Hitchcockian and not schlocky where we'd be locked in with all the other B-movies being made. It would've been easy to do a contemporary martial-arts-driven action story set in LA, finish it



In the alternate universe of *SIX-STRING SAMURAI*, the Kid (Justin McGuire) and Buddy (Jeff Falcon) follow the road to Lost Vegas, last bastion of freedom.

quickly, shot in 16 mm, make money but then never transcend all the other similar films. It had to look legitimate, to be something unique, so we decided to a more fantasy style of film."

Jovially shaking his head, Mungia recalled, "Jeff said, 'Hey, why don't we just do a film in the desert?'"—they laugh—"So one night we're talking in a restaurant; I'm wearing Elvis Costello glasses, and Jeff asked, 'How can you see through those?' He tried them on, and I thought he looked like Buddy Holly. We laughed, stared at each other, and it hit us. A rock and roll, samurai martial arts movie. And if our hero is a rock-and-roller, then everyone else should be, too. The lead antagonist was this masked, top-hat wearing, long haired killer named Death, representing a heavy metal motif. He inadvertently looked like Slash—it wasn't planned. His archer gang was initially intended to look like other rock icons like Tom Petty and Paul McCartney."

Falcon further explained, "We didn't

want to have to depend on finding one good actor who'd demand pay, good living conditions and who wouldn't suffer filming in desolate areas and sand dunes, so we put a black stocking over Death's head to hide his face. In fact by everyone being heavily costumed, everybody could play everybody else. My character's isn't Buddy Holly, but is called Buddy through word association, like "Hey, buddy.""

So what exactly is going on in this film? Well, it's 1957, the bomb has been dropped, and the Russians have taken over America. The last fortress of freedom is Lost Vegas where Elvis the King has died. So Vegas needs a new king, and every guitar-picking, sword-swinging opportunist is hoping to fill the legendary blue-suede shoes. The film opens with tall, feathery reeds ominously wafting in the wind as a little kid, played by newcomer Justin McGuire, witnesses his family being killed by rock throwing Grungies. All is lost. Suddenly, a maniacal

warrior appears from nowhere and with steel slashing riffs, his concert of death claims its first victims amidst the foot-stomping surfer sounds of the Russian-born, rock group Red Elvises. From that point on the music, literally, doesn't stop, and anything goes.

Raised in San Diego, Falcon has studied martial arts for twenty years and earned himself a Master's Degree from the Beijing Physical Sports University. While teaching martial arts in Taiwan, he was invited to Hong Kong to appear in his first film, *INSPECTOR WHO WEARS A SKIRT*. Seventeen films later, he was well prepared to think on his feet: "In Hong Kong," he squints, "they don't prepare you for anything. Right before you shoot, they give you dialogue to memorize, then throw you in front of the camera. My biggest challenge in this film was not having enough time to do anything—between doing costumes, acting, props, sets, helping people carry things, choreography and shooting action. Chinese

URAI

action live.

martial arts taught me to focus quickly and effectively, so I could jump from doing costumes to acting.

Falcon considers Mungia the most helpful director with whom he has ever worked from an acting standpoint. "I listened carefully to Lance, and he was good at bringing out my character in myself. My biggest advantage of doing this film is that in reality I'm not an actor. Why an advantage? Because many actors that study acting carry a lot of baggage with them, so they have to prepare and do things a certain way."

Mungia disagreed: "Jeff says he's not an actor, but in reality, he can do it. Throughout filming, Jeff loosened up, became very fluid and essentially transformed into an actor. He has a great future as a leading man and not just through his martial arts. I've seen his Hong Kong stuff, and he was really never given the opportunity to act or have a director direct him. There was a nice moment in the film when Buddy sees Vegas for the first time and there is a smile on his face—it was an honest moment for Jeff."

A Loyola Marymount film school grad, Mungia asserts that a Hitchcock classic and his rural hometown of Delano, California were his inspirations for *SIX-STRING*'s spacial sense. "In *NORTH BY NORTHWEST*, there's a scene with Cary Grant coming to a bus stop. That was shot down the street from where I live. Hitchcock held on this shot and we'd watch this car for a minute and you'd hear this sound continuing away. It shows an amazing sense of space, and that was always the coolest

Lance Mungia (right) directs Jeffrey Falcon, who stars as the Buddy Holly look-alike action hero.



Death (Stephane Gauger, third from left) and his gang vie with Buddy for the crown of Rock and Roll King.

thing. Hitchcock had balls to do that and spend that much time on a sound cue, with nothing else happening."

What is so captivating about *SIX-STRING* is Falcon and Lance's ode to Americana: from cheerleaders to gumballs, our childhood fears of eating spinach and the boogie man, bowlers tossing coins like Bogart, the Land of Oz and Vegas, spacemen and the Cleaver family all neatly wrapped in rock and roll. And Buddy Holly will champion our way of life against the Russians. It's so brain-busting, bizarre and far-out, that psychotic doesn't begin to describe this film.

One of the highlights occurs when the kid is following Buddy, and Buddy draws a line in the gravelly ground, saying, "Cross that line kid and I'll cut your little teddy bear in half. Haven't you ever heard of the story about the kid who crossed the line? The Spinach Monster grabbed him, pulled him underground, and made him eat spinach all day. Rumor has it, kid, he's still there." The kid uses his teddy bear to erase the line then leaves the bear behind and follows Buddy. I actually felt sorry for the scruffy bear rolling in the dirty cruel wind. By losing the bear and following Buddy, the kid is in essence becoming a man and leaving his childhood behind him. He wants something in life that is meaningful. Buddy on the other hand is still searching for something. Vegas. His pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Look for the Latino midget telling Buddy to "Follow the yellow brick road, homey."

Lance explained the genesis of the Spinach Monster from Hell: "When I was a kid," he gleefully glared, "I was told to watch out for the boogie man, and I didn't like eating spinach. With the references to Americana, I convey the fact that the things that are in this world, the things that were

once normal American things, have now become deified, and so the Spinach Monster was once the boogie man and is now becoming real. When the kid is in Hell, it plays on a child's nightmare, and that is accentuated when the kid is underground trapped in Hell trying to reach for Buddy's sword, his way out, and then these ugly nightmarish Windmill Creatures spookily emerge out of the fog. It's like the Morlocks in Wells' *TIME MACHINE*, and it's also about *JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH* and Dante's *Inferno*, the idea of the hero going down to hell and rescuing something or someone and pulling it back up to earth. And the gumballs? We thought it would be a kid's fantasy to have candy shot at you."

So what's the point of the film? "Its relationship between Buddy and the kid in becoming a man and taking responsibility," Mungia posited thoughtfully. "But there really isn't a message, because you will interpret it in your own way. That's what makes it a fantasy, and we all have different imaginations. You can't convey a meaning because the audience will get what they get. For me to try to impose my thought on what you are thinking is lame."

"The characters in *SIX-STRING*," Mungia contends, "are mythic in structure, almost an homage to *The Man With No Name* or the whole Arthurian legend. The fallen hero, a samurai falling on hard times, drinks too much, hates kids, and this kid is a pure thing that enters his life. I wanted our film to give us hope and have meaning. When someone dies, there has to be something behind it. Filmmakers have a degree of responsibility, and we don't need to do films with over the-top-violence and cussing. *SIX-STRING* has no swearing or blood but lots of action. It conveys life and hopefully touches people." □

JOHN CARPENTER'S VAMPIRES

Blood sucking freaks infest the Earth in the new fright fest from the master of horror.

"I know fucking well there's a god, because I kill vampires for a living. Are you listening? I kill vampires for money. A lot of it. So don't tell me there ain't no God. I know fucking well there's a God. I just don't understand him."

—Jack Crow, from John Steakley's novel *Vampire\$*

JOHN CARPENTER'S *VAMPIRES* tells the story of the battle between professional vampire hunter Jack Crow (James Woods) and Valek (Thomas Ian Griffith), Crow's 600-year-old nemesis. Crow leads a team of slayers who trace their origins back to the Crusades and are secretly funded by the Vatican. Likewise, Valek leads a band of Master Vampires who seek a fabled religious artifact that will allow them to walk in daylight. After premiering in France, the gory, action-packed film was picked up by Sony Pictures for a Halloween release.

The *VAMPIRES* project had come to Carpenter in late '96. Bar Potter, CEO of Largo Entertainment, gave the director a copy of John Steakley's 1990 novel *Vampire\$*, along with two screenplay adaptations. Largo had made several efforts to mount a film. Some pre-production work had even been done on a version to be directed by Russell Mulcahy (*HIGHLANDER*) with Patrick Swayze as Crow. Ultimately, nothing had come of any of the efforts.

BY JOHN THONEN



Director Carpenter on the set of *Vampires*.

Carpenter read the book and the existing scripts, one by Dan Jakoby and one by Don Mazur. He found much he liked in each. "Everything has its strengths and weaknesses," he explained. "But I found a lot of strengths." Carpenter went back to Largo, telling them he thought he could make a good film by combining elements of all three sources, along with some ideas of his own. "Really,

I cannibalized everyone else's work," the director said. "Ultimately, it has to be about the people. So the relationships between the characters is primarily what I brought to it."

From the outset, Carpenter saw *VAMPIRES* as different from most of its cinematic predecessors. "It was inherent in the location," he said. "It's the American southwest. So you know it's not a gothic vampire

movie and not an urban vampire movie. I realized I could do something with this." What Carpenter envisioned was a chance to partially realize a lifelong dream to make a western. "I think that virtually all of John's movies are westerns," said Sandy King, Carpenter's wife and partner in Storm King Productions. "He got into this business to make them, but no one is watching the kind of western with horses anymore."

Satisfied with Carpenter's take on the project, Largo wanted a script as quickly as possible. Largo can approve budgets up to \$15-million without participation of its owner, Japanese electronics giant JVC. Sandy King explained, "That meant we had to have a script we could film for that amount, or be tied up for months in corporate red tape." Luckily, Carpenter could handle the script duties himself. "Basically I kept myself alive by screenwriting," he said of his early days, writing *EYES OF LAURA MARS*, *THE PHILADELPHIA EXPERIMENT*, and others. "The biggest decision is committing," he added. "I always try to imagine myself sitting down to watch the finished movie, and when I did that, I could see *VAMPIRES*." Despite a penchant for what he describes as "procrastination," the director wrote a draft in a scant 6 weeks.

With the screenplay in hand, Largo approved Storm King to handle the production. Sandy



In *VAMPIRES*, Valek (Thomas Ian Griffith) uses Jack Crow (James Woods) as a human sacrifice in a ritual that will enable the vampire to walk unharmed in daylight.

King would act as producer, as she has on Carpenter's last several films. The next step was to call in two frequent collaborators. Makeup effects master Greg Nicotero, of KNB, and stunt coordinator, Jeff Imada. "I usually give Jeff and Greg a finished screenplay to read, and we sit down and talk about it," recalled Carpenter. The technique is a major factor in Carpenter's much lauded ability to put every production dollar on the screen. "They tell me what's feasible and what's going to be a problem," he explained. "They make suggestions for this scene or that. Then I go back and kind of polish the script."

Nicotero would later describe the production as "hard work—very intense." Sandy King would come to refer to it as "like an experiment in terror." However, the greatest frustrations in bringing the film to the screen didn't lie in achieving the stunts, the effects, or any of the rest of the 70 plus days of production. Instead, they de-

rived from the non-creative battles that comprise film financing and distribution today.

At the point when Storm King was ready to get underway, Carpenter and King met their first major obstacle. Largo wanted the film completed before the end of their fiscal year. To meet the desired completion date the film needed to be in pre-production by April. Yet it was Largo themselves that stood in the way. Having put up the money for script and casting, they stalled on starting production. "The biggest challenge at the outset was getting the green light," said Sandy King. "It's a joke really. They bring a project to you. They want to start right away. You knock yourself out getting it ready to go, and then you can't get the OK to actually start."

The hurry-up-and-wait approach to *VAMPIRES* was clearly a major frustration for both producer and director. Part of the John Carpenter mystique has been his willingness to

work with both major studios and smaller independents. To King, the notion has lost much of its allure. "People have this romantic notion about there being more freedom with the independents" she said. "What it really means is that they have less money. The hardest thing is getting the schedule and budget to meet the requirements of the production and the financial entity funding it."

"Everybody thinks they know how movies are made," said Carpenter, but "they have no idea. They keep negotiating with you, right to the end. It's happened one way or another on almost every movie I've made. That's the way they do business."

I never killed a priest before. I wonder if God will strike me down on the spot? What do you say Padre—will he kick my ass if I kill you?

—Jack Crow from *John Carpenter's script*

As Sandy King prepared to get casting underway she made

a fortuitous visit to a film premiere. "James Woods was outside being interviewed," she said. "Jimmy was joking about wanting to be the next action hero. I'm sitting there thinking, *You know, that could work.*" King reasoned that to make a mere mortal believable as a slayer of immortal vampires "he would have to have an element of coldness and darkness to rival a vampire." She pointed out that "so often in a horror movie, the monster is the most interesting character. We tried to offset that by having James Woods, who is equally fascinating. We didn't want it to be, 'Oh, he wins because he has the better weapon or because God is on his side.' He wins because he is as tough, or tougher, than the monster." King elaborated, "I think there's a corporate mentality today that only casts what is expected. You have to look beyond the obvious. Jimmy plays bad guys really well, and I thought it interesting to bring



Prostitute Katrina (Sheryl Lee) is about to become a different kind of lady of the night—and a pawn in the battle between Valek and Crow's vampire hunters.

that hardness that he's known for and make him an anti-hero protagonist."

With Woods in the lead, King cast Daniel Baldwin as Jack Crow's right hand man, Montoya. "When you have someone like James Woods as your hero," she explained, "you have to make sure you're countering it with some warmth. To give the film some heart."

For the crucial role of Valek, King selected action star, Thomas Ian Griffith. "Thomas moves like a panther," King said. "He has this quality of physical grace and animal magnetism that is so charismatic." The 6' 5" actor is a skilled martial artist. Despite a Broadway debut at age 19, along with a recent string of low-budget action films, he is probably still best known for his film debut as the villain in *KARATE KID 3*. He was eager to make the next step in the cinematic food chain. "I wanted on this film so bad. Just to work with John," he said.

I was bitten by a vampire for Christ's sake! How many peo-

ple ever get bitten by a vampire? What—a few hundred, maybe a thousand out of everyone who's ever lived on this planet since vampires were invented. Why me?

—Katrina from John Carpenter's script

A trickier bit of casting was the pivotal role of Katrina, the film's only female character of any note. Katrina is a prostitute who is bitten by Valek early in the film, yet survives. As a result, a psychic link is established between her and her attacker. Crow and Montoya use Katrina to track their vampiric quarry. Complicating the situation, Katrina is beginning to "turn," becoming a literal lady of the night. In addition, Montoya finds himself falling in love with the doomed girl. Casting director Ruben Cannon, a long time friend of Carpenter's, suggested actress Sheryl Lee, best known as Laura Palmer in TV's *TWIN PEAKS*.

King's initial reaction was "Gee, I'm not really familiar with what she's done except

hang around dead in cellophane." Cannon asked that King meet with the actress. "She was intriguing from the moment she walked in," the producer recalled. "She looked like an angel with dirty wings. Then I learned that she was a very, very good actress. Very willing to trust her director and co-workers." The 31 year old actress was equally taken with the role. "Katrina is not 100% vampire, and not 100% human," she said. "I was fascinated to explore that."

The remainder of the key cast members were rounded out with: Academy Award winner Maximilian Schell as Cardinal Alba, Crow's Vatican liaison; and Tim Guinee, who was pulling acting double-duty during part of the film's production. In *VAMPIRES*, Guinee plays Father Adam, a newly-assigned member of Crow's vampire hunters. Ironically, in the upcoming *BLADE*, he plays a vampire who is being hunted by Wesley's Snipes' title character.

With production finally approved by Largo, Carpenter,

King and company took up residence in northern New Mexico. Star James Woods described the location as "beautiful and serene, but forbidding in ways that you don't expect. The whole area around Santa Fe has a haunted beauty about it, which is, when you think about it, the plight of the vampire." Production designer Thomas Walsh and his team built interior sets on stages at nearby Garson Studios. Walsh also designed Crow's formidable weaponry: futuristic-looking crossbows and medieval-looking pikes. For Crow's team, Walsh said he "adapted the symbol of the Knights of Malta as the slayer logo." Walsh chose this emblem of the early Crusades because the Knights of Malta were financed by the Catholic church—much the same as Crow and his slayers.

Greg Nicotero oversaw the work by the KNB Effects Group, which counts *VAMPIRE IN BROOKLYN* and *FROM DUSK 'TIL DAWN* in its bloodsucker resume. While those films relied on prosthetic

VAMPIRES

DRESSED TO KILL

Fashion attire for vampires and vampire hunters.

Even John Carpenter's most ardent detractors acknowledge him as a master of *mise en scene*, a French term that describes utilization of all facets of a scene—props, costumes, surroundings, staging—to support the director's vision. Of course, no director of a major film can personally handle every element involved. Carpenter has relied heavily on a stock company of artists with a proven ability to collaborate with him on a common vision. Having counted VAMPIRES as her sixth film with Carpenter, costume designer Robin Michel Bush is obviously a key participant in this process.

Bush has a short list of the positive aspects of working with the director. "Everything—absolutely everything," she said. "I don't think you'll find anybody that will say anything bad about the man. He's a consummate filmmaker. He gives creative freedom, yet he's hands-on." As for her contributions to their collaborations: "Well, I think my designs are pretty good," she laughed. "Beyond that, I give him the ability to shoot any inch of any player, whether it's an atmosphere player or the star of the show, and know that it's right. "No one leaves my trailer without

being 100%."

Bush has worked on some colossal period pieces, such as the WINDS OF WAR mini-series, but her greatest challenges are films of the fantastic genres. "Period pieces can be very satisfying. If you execute it right, you can't miss. It's like being with an old lover who knows how to satisfy you. It's comfortable. But the fantasy films are like a new lover. You're striving for something different. Something you haven't done before. Sometimes you find something very special."

Bush explained, "John likes to see full illustrations. I do them full color, so it takes about a day per sketch," Bush explained. "During these preparatory weeks, Bush works with sketch artist Gina Flanagan to create the final illustrations. "It's kind of like she's my piano. She doesn't play a note on her own, but if I play the note, she can make beautiful music."

One of the trickier aspects of costuming prep is that the actors have often not yet been cast. "We have to imagine what we think they look like. The person I drew for Valek looked amazingly like Thomas [Ian Griffith] even though he hadn't been cast. It was like I had some psychic link with the

Vampire Masters," Bush laughed.

While considerable emphasis was placed on the look of the title characters, Bush herself was most taken with the appearance of Team Crow. For the band of vampire hunters, Bush had to design something that looked believably vampire-safe. Using the same material as bulletproof vests, she had mesh neck guards made, along with exaggerated shoulder pads. She then added ripples, tucks and weavings to give the feel of armor. "At first, we were going to do the hunters in a silhouette of the crusades, but John also saw the movie as a gothic western. So we also wanted a modern look, with a slightly retro feel. We had some trouble getting the two to mesh," she explained. Remarkably, Bush managed to accomplish both of her visual goals. In close-ups, the western look of the characters dominates. In longer shots, they could probably pass for knights heading to the crusades. "It was a challenging project, and it could have easily messed up" said the designer. "It's been good to hear that people think it worked both ways visually."

Team Crow's leader, Jack Crow proved to have an easier look than his cohorts. "I talked to Jimmy Woods on the phone, and we both had the same thought," said Bush. "This guy was such a hero, has so much inside, that we didn't want to gunk him up." Bush was savvy enough to rely largely on Woods' star power to carry the character. Crow is attired in jeans, a jean jacket, and a glacial, bad-ass glare.

Opposing Team Crow is the world's original vampire, 600 year old Jan Valek, and his team of 7 Master Vampires. Since Valek's dialogue is kept to a minimum, and the masters have none at all, their look was crucial. "I didn't want to go too gothic—you know, that collar and all," explained Bush. "A lot of what you do in costuming is trying to suggest something at a subconscious level. I went with fringes and torn hems, things that



"This guy had so much going on inside that we didn't want to gunk him up," Robin Bush of Jack Crow's look.

would suggest that the Masters were pieces of dregs from the earth. They also suggest a fluidity, like a vapor rising from the earth."

An important part of the Vampire Masters look was for them to be sensual. Bush found this aspect the least demanding of her responsibilities. "I used silk, velvet and silk brocade—fabrics that you want to touch," she explained. "I think that comes through on film, but beyond that, I don't know that I had a lot to do with it. Sandy cast people who were so gorgeous. I mean, Marjean [Holden] is like 5'11" and built like nobody's business. You can put something on her, and it doesn't look intentional for being sexy; it's just her spirit and strength that shines through. It's very easy to make her look good."

For Valek, Bush designed a kind of western duster coat that moved in the winds of the film's desert setting to convey the vaporous imagery she desired. "I did a lot of texture stuff, lines and slashes in the coat, that are meant to signify the scars of his many centuries of battle."

Bush is probably proudest of her robes for Maximillian Schell's character, Cardinal Alba. "Those are kind of a masterpiece for me," she said. "Of course, you're blessed when you have someone like him. That robe probably weighed 20 pounds, but you would never know it; he was so fluid, so graceful in it." To design the robes, Bush went to Cotter's, a religious shop that does a great deal of business for motion pictures. "Patrick Cotter actually called an archbishop so we could be sure we were current with any recent changes in their dress." **John Thonen**

Vampires customer Bush used clothing to underscore the character's persona.



VAMPIRES

SANDY KING

Carpenter's secret weapon, wife and producer.

By John Thonen

The making of a major film is in many ways similar to the mounting of a military campaign. Both begin with intensive planning, followed by the assembly and mobilization of forces and, finally, execution. Each relies heavily on the collaborative efforts of a number of people of differing skills and responsibilities. In spite of the importance of these team members, both activities also rely on the guidance of a leader whose decisions are beyond question. In the best of circumstances, both can also benefit from an unexpected strength—a secret weapon if you will. For John Carpenter, that secret weapon is producer Sandy King.

With a touch of modesty uncommon amongst film producers, King describes herself only as a “glorified wrangler.” Her real standing in the Team Carpenter camp becomes clear when you talk with those who have worked with her. Sheryl Lee, one of the film’s stars, describes King as “fantastic—she’s there every day, in the trenches with cast and crew.” It’s not just highly paid stars that value King. Costume designer Robin Michel Bush said that “from a crew member’s viewpoint, she is one of the best producers there is. She gives you the feeling that if you have to run behind a trailer and get sick, she wants to be there to help you.” The value John Carpenter places on Sandy King is obvious: he married her.

King began her ascent to “secret weapon” status after graduating from UCLA in 1973. She worked as an animator, working on the Oscar-winning film, *ANTI MATTER*. She served as a script supervisor for



Husband and Wife: Director John Carpenter and Producer Sandy King

a number of adult films in the '70s. (“Believe it or not” King laughed, “some of them did have scripts.”) She moved on to low-budget fare such as *THE INCREDIBLE MELTING MAN* and *BLUE SUNSHINE*, and also worked for Roger Corman at New World.

Eventually King began to work primarily as a script supervisor. “Sandy did that for about 15 years” said Karin Costa. Costa has been a close friend of Sandy King’s since they were neighbors at the age of two. She has also been Carpenter’s assistant since 1987’s *PRINCE OF DARKNESS*. “Sandy worked for Francis Ford Coppola, Walter Hill, Michael Mann,” Costa continued. “Her reputation was that if she wasn’t the best, she was one of the best.” King’s

fondest memories of that phase of her career center on Coppola. “I worked for Francis on *THE OUTSIDERS* and *RUMBLE-FISH*. He’s just a brilliant man, and I love him dearly,” she said. “He’s my second favorite director. I married my first favorite.”

Sandy’s years in the lower echelons of film production gave her a unique perspective on the process. “We’ve all worked on films with some guy who seems to have an overwhelming urge to keep telling you how big his dick is. I mean, hey, who cares? I would wonder why, when we were working so hard, these people couldn’t be cooler. What I found out is that it’s not so hard. It doesn’t cost anymore to not be an asshole. In fact you gain a lot in morale.”

Sandy met Carpenter while

working as script supervisor on *STARMAN* in 1984. The relationship soon blossomed. She has worked closely with the director on every film since. Along the way, she developed her own philosophy about the role of a producer. “I’m old fashioned. I really believe that production exists to serve the director’s vision and to serve the crew, so they can help meet that vision,” she explained. “Let’s face it, thousands of student filmmakers prove every year that you don’t need a producer to make a film.”

Sandy first tested her philosophy as associate producer on 1988’s *THEY LIVE*. “Sandy is very, very intelligent,” said Costa. “Anything she sets her mind to, is going to be done. There’s just no doubt about it.” This was certainly the case with King’s entry into the job of producing: with the exception of *ESCAPE FROM L.A.*, she has produced all of her husband’s subsequent films.

Her approach derives from the old Hollywood system, when most of a studio’s output shared many cast and crew members because they worked full time for that studio. While those days are long gone, King and Carpenter take a similar approach. “We’re pretty loyal,” she explained. “We’ve actually been known to reschedule our productions so we can work with someone we like to use. We choose these people because we think they are the best, and we have a good working relationship. That saves a lot of time by eliminating the get acquainted period, not to mention the infighting. I know some people think I’m a Pollyanna, but I think it’s coming back—to be a little nicer, a little more honorable. That those aren’t bad



King and Carpenter, collaborating on the set of *THEY LIVE* (1988).

words.”

King’s technique has a specific goal. “The primary allegiance has to be to the film,” she explained. “A lot of us came up through old Hollywood training. There is one captain of the ship, and that’s the director.” Helping her husband achieve his particular vision of a film is first and foremost in this producer’s mind. “I know when he’ll be hesitant to ask for what he really wants, because he thinks it’s too much money,” she said. “So I know to look for a way to do it. It’s a life I value, being with someone I love and respect. The respect came first. I thought he was a great filmmaker from the get go. Then I found out he was a great man too, and I fell in love with him.”

Even though King only works her crews 5-day weeks, Carpenter has never had a film go over schedule. *VAMPIRES* was no exception. “Sandy does a lot of nice things for the crew,” said Costa. “About midway, morale tends to get down. On *VAMPIRES* Sandy rented an entire restaurant for her and the crew to eat, drink and watch the Mike Tyson fight. One Sunday she got Sheryl Lee and the other women in the cast and the girls from the office, and took them all to a spa for a little pampering.”

Sheryl Lee makes it clear that such actions are anything but typical from a film producer. “Sandy should run a school that all other producers are re-

quired to go to,” said Lee. “Then they could learn how to do their jobs well and still be decent human beings.”

After years of being packed 5-6 deep in a cramped Travelodge room for some Corman production, King provides only quality housing for her crew. In many cases she even arranges for cast and crew member’s families to stay with them. While it’s clear that Sandy’s approach to her work derives from an innate decency rare in her business, she can’t understand why it isn’t the norm. “Say you’re a jerk—that you don’t give a damn about anyone but yourself,” she explained. “Then just be pragmatic about it. If people are happy and having a good weekend when they aren’t working, and have their families there, don’t you think they are going to work better? I don’t think you can help but benefit.”

From the quality of her productions, to the opinions of her co-workers, it’s obvious that Sandy King is something special amongst film producers. However, one of the most endearing things about her is that the 40-something year old film veteran hasn’t become jaded and bored with her work. “It’s cool what we do,” she said excitedly. “It’s magic. I still get excited just to drive down the highway at night and see somebody who’s shooting. I want to know who they are, what they are doing. I’m like a kid at the big top. It still excites me.” □

A WESTERN VAMPIRE MOVIE

“It was inherent in the location. It’s the American southwest,” said Carpenter. “So it’s not a gothic or an urban vampire movie. I realized I could do something with this.”

makeup, Carpenter and Nicotero had a simpler concept in mind. “We didn’t want to get into a rut,” explained the effects wizard, “repeating work we’ve already done.” The resulting makeup is probably most comparable to that of *INTERVIEW WITH A VAMPIRE*. The look features the requisite teeth, along with contact lenses, pale makeup and slight veins. “We did some tests on me using stretch and stipple, looking to give the impression that there are no fluids in the body,” Nicotero explained.

The women playing the vampires were particularly taken with the makeup, and its application. Sheryl Lee said, “I loved it. They put it on everyday with an airbrush. It’s this focused air blowing on you, and I found it relaxing. I wanted them to do it to me even when I didn’t need make up.” *VAMPIRES* is Lee’s first exposure to extensive makeup, and to the people who applied it. She found she enjoyed both. “I was always excited when I had to get into makeup because I knew the KNB trailer was the fun trailer,” she said. Marjean Holden, who portrays one of Valek’s Vampire Masters also found that the makeup benefited her performance. Because of “the way they were able to make the veins, the shadowing,” she said, “we felt like vampires. I ran around with this urge to bite someone. It was bizarre. They made it so appealing by the way they had us dressed, our hair, the way the makeup was, the contacts. People on the set would say to me, ‘Don’t look at me, because you make me want to do bad things.’”

Nicotero shares a viewpoint with Carpenter regarding film effects. “I think we’d have better films if more people cared about the art of filmmaking,” he said “as opposed to just being

technologically dazzling. John wants the effects to drive the movie forward, not hit a point where the movie stops to show off an effect.” All of which is not to say that *VAMPIRES* doesn’t feature some powerful effects oriented sequences.

She went to something beyond hideous when the sunlight struck her. He had never seen anything like that blurred, vibrating frenzy, and that fire, those bursting flames that erupted from deep inside her skin, as if she were being blown outward by some fierce vindictory pressure.

—From John Steakley’s novel

The film opens with Crow and his team, descending on a nest of vampires in an isolated farmhouse. The slayers spear a female vampire with a cross-bow bolt. A wire runs from the bolt to a winch on the team’s vehicle. Hearing the shout “We’ve hooked a fish,” Montoya fires up the winch and drags the she-creature out into the sun, where she bursts into flames. “We figured that’s the first time that you see them burn up,” said Nicotero, “so that’s where we would feature it. As the vampires are being dragged closer to the door, a little sunlight hits them. “The stunt guys would ignite smoke cookies on them so they would start to smoke. Then, as soon as they were dragged into the sunlight another button would ignite these amazing fires. The actor’s bodies were packed with a liquid that made the flames burn green. We used a metallic base, so the fire is much more intense. I don’t think it’s been done this way before.” Following the scenes of the stunt-actor bursting into flames a third cut was made, to a dummy burning with flames 10 feet high.

VAMPIRES

CARPENTER'S WEB

The Internet provides reams of information for the rabid fan.

In February, while Largo was negotiating U.S. distribution for JOHN CARPENTER'S VAMPIRES, *Cinefantastique* wanted to run a "teaser" article on the film. However, concerns of premature publicity made crucial elements of such coverage scarce. Instead, the magazine turned to alternative sources, including the ubiquitous, world wide web.

Carpenter's appeal to film-oriented webmasters is easy to understand. The director's protagonists are outsiders, rebels, distrustful of society and its systems. It's a description of Plissken, MacReady and Nada, and a pretty fair description of the average web fanatic. In Carpenter's creations Internet fans find a kindred spirit. It's no surprise that some choose to honor him.

Any Carpenter-oriented search of the web should start with Mark Bright's "John Carpenter's Web Page." ([//visi2.ctsy.cf.ac.uk/bright/carp.html](http://visi2.ctsy.cf.ac.uk/bright/carp.html)). Bright is a 24 year old PhD student in Cardiff, Wales. His site offers film reviews, regularly updated Carpenter news, a solid biography of the director, various articles and interviews, uncompleted Carpenter projects and a nice collection of photos. Bright himself has a hard time committing to whether HALLOWEEN or THE THING is his favorite Carpenter creation. "It just depends what day of the week it is," he explained.

Like the most subject-specific sites on the net, Bright's has no direct affiliation with its subject. None of which kept the webmaster from offering stills from VAMPIRES European trailer, shots borrowed from an TV entertainment magazine's visit to the set and comments from people who had seen previews of the film. All months before the film's release.

Bright's links page will quickly connect you to Mohammed Kahn's "The Carpentized Side of the Web" (

John Carpenter's appeal to webmasters has resulted in a wide variety of entertaining sites being dedicated to the director's life and films.

wood/Academy/94124_Carpenter.html) The concept is similar to Bright's, but offers a handy listing of Carpenter films upcoming on national or cable TV. Quite helpful for those wanting a Carpenter film marathon. Or, in this writer's case, to research the director's oeuvre.

One of the more unusual Carpenter-related sites is at (scf.usc.edu/~cooling/what.htm). Canadian Chris Cooling offers a thought-provoking analysis of Carpenter's films from a film industry perspective. Ever wondered why Carpenter never became an industry "A" list director? Cooling may have some answers. Derived from a USC course assignment, Cooling has much to offer anyone with more than a casual interest in the director.

Beyond the generalized Carpenter sites, there are also some film-specific sites. Josh Horowitz and John Tate offer the very enjoyable "Falcon's BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA Home Page" (geocities.com/Area51/Vault/7191/). This tribute to Carpenter's unjustly maligned kung fu comedy is good looking, well-designed and a lot of fun. Quite a bit like the film it honors. There's also a fine assortment of WAV files offering amusing sound bites from the film.

One of the more impressive of the film specific sites is found at (www.halloweenmovie.com/) The site is operated in connection

with Trancas International, who currently hold the film rights to the HALLOWEEN name.

Created by college students Brian Martin and Bruce Dierbeck. Currently, it's maintained by Daniel Farrands, who wrote HALLOWEEN 5. The site offers a synopsis of the entries in the series, interviews, photos, music, sounds, chat rooms, trailers, a list of film gaffes and even a map of the series imaginary locale, Haddonfield.

The Mother of All Carpenter film-specific sites would have to be the incredible "Tribute to The Thing" (powerup.com.aul-vampire/thing/thing.htm) an amazingly obsessive ode to Carpenter's cult classic, scifi horror film. The site's webmaster is 27 year old Australian Jamie Horne who said in an email that, "The only reason I even got an Internet account was to design a web page on THE THING—to create a place that all fans of the movie could visit to find out all there was to know on it." Delivering "all" the available knowledge on any subject is a goal seemingly doomed to failure. However, it must be said that with this remarkable site, Horne comes frighteningly close to accomplishing that goal.

There are many other Carpenter related sites out there. Some look at Carpenter's films scores; others offer his scripts for sale. One even features "Harlequin," a short story he wrote while in college. They are intelligent, informative and more than a little obsessive.

A combination sure to benefit film fan and film student alike. Perhaps the most telling fact regarding the growing value of such web sites lies in how the first word came to *Cinefantastique* that VAMPIRES had found a distributor. The initial announcement came not from Largo, the publicist or even Carpenter's office. It was posted on Mark Bright's web site. **John Thonen**

To get maximum effect out of the gag, Nicotero and Carpenter discussed a scene in THE THING where Kurt Russell sets fire to a character named Windows. "You see him sitting in the corner," recalled Nicotero "and his legs are still kicking while he burns. It's incredibly simple, but it's very effective. We rigged buried rods so the legs kick and then slowly stop as it finally dies." For the aftermath, KNB's foam sculptors carved skeletal bodies in various positions. Actual skulls and bones were then added, and the foam bodies were stuffed with a large quantity of ash from burned newspapers. "We wanted it to look like a loaf of bread that was baked until there was nothing left but an ash form," Nicotero explained. "When the wind hit them the ash blew away, and there are these burnt body husks and bones left. You got the impression that the bodies burned away, leaving these skeletons. It was very nice."

The farmhouse sequence is quickly followed by Valek's attack on the slayers at a motel where they are drunkenly celebrating their victory with some local prostitutes. The sequence took four days to film and left the sets drenched in stage blood. "We did a lot of stuff that was pretty gruesome," said Nicotero. "The vampires are so powerful that just a swipe of their hand will slit a throat. Then we went to a dummy head. It was on a cable so it would just fall off the shoulders and blood would gush. It's quick and it's cheap, but that's not why you do it. You do it because it's effective."

Obviously, Crow survives the motel massacre. He returns the next day to survey the aftermath. "There was like 14, maybe 18 people killed," said Nicotero, "all very violently. "You just assume there would be a lot of blood. We literally had super soakers filled with blood and were spraying everywhere. We'd just tell the people lying there to close their eyes and we'd just spray. It's really fun to do stuff like that."

When Nicotero saw the finished film this past December, he was particularly taken with Carpenter's technique in a sequence wherein Valek attacks a

monastery. "A lot of Valek's action is seen in POV shots," he explained. "They were complicated shots where we'd start with the vampire's POV across from a church. We'd follow across the street, and then move right up to this old woman. All POV. I had finger extensions on my hand and I'd run up along side the camera and then wipe my hand up along her neck. Then, we put the actress in the same position, but now with the slit throat prosthetic and blood tubing. They literally jump cut from my hand crossing her throat to her throat opening up and blood gushing out. It was incredibly effective. It's the kind of thing that happens so fast that you go 'Wait a minute—what did I just see?' I really think people won't be sure what was done until it comes out on laser and you can step-frame through it."

Carpenter used a similar technique during the motel attack. "That was complicated," he said. "But what was interesting was that I went against the traditional way to shoot an action scene." The director shot many of the close-up inserts in slow motion. Instead of the expected quick cuts of rapidly moving action, he used dissolves to move from the longer shots into the slow motion close-ups. "In the middle of an action scene you don't expect that," he said. "I can't exactly explain what it is about it, but I hadn't seen anything much like it, and I love it"

VAMPIRES marks a number of differences in terms of Carpenter's almost patented approach to filmmaking. "I decided to make this movie a little bit edgier than most of my films," the director said. "Woods certainly is. I let him go way out. I also stacked up the coverage to get the tempo up. There are a lot of action scenes, just one after another. It was a lot of work; you need a lot of footage. The only place I went back to my original style of directing was in the motel room where Daniel Baldwin and Sheryl Lee are holed up. That was a more traditional way of shooting."

Carpenter's past work has often featured homages to filmmakers who have influenced him, most frequently to his idol

UP TEMPO

"I decided to make this movie edgier than most of my films," said Carpenter. "I also stacked up the coverage to get the tempo up. There are a lot of action scenes."



Fearless Vampire Killers are lead by Jack Crow (James Woods).

Howard Hawks. VAMPIRES still reflects Carpenter's debt to Hawks, particularly in regards to the characters and their relationships. However, the film's visual style derived from other sources. "I even rip Leone off in a couple of shots," Carpenter said. "I have Woods standing in front of the farmhouse, where the nest of vampires was. I looked at the shot and thought, 'You know, I'm going to do this.' So I zoomed in on the eyes, just like Bronson in ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST. It's a cheesy rip-off, but at my age, I just have no shame."

Even a glance at the film's trailer will reveal another source for the look and, particularly, the editing of VAMPIRES. "There are certainly Peckinpah influences in the way I shot the film," Carpenter admitted. "He developed a now much-copied way of shooting, where you line up two-to-six cameras, all facing whatever you're shooting, all with different lenses and operating at different speeds. Anybody can make a movie if you have enough coverage, and this guarantees that you do. You can cut

in the middle, beginning, end. I was always loathe to do this, but in action scenes it's the only way to do it."

VAMPIRE'S visuals and pace reflect the director's many different influences. He has no doubt the film most clearly reflects him. "You do these things by force of personality. That's what a director is. It's on the screen. Their personality. You hear legendary stories of directors, some chaotic, some dictators, some neurotic. My force of personality is that I want courtesy and professionalism. I want everyone to do their job, and I'm going to do mine, and I want everyone to have as much fun as they can as long as the other things happen."

Like most of Carpenter's protagonists, Crow represents an alter-ego for the director. "They are my dark action heroes, my fantasy figures," he explained. "Who I imagine I would be if I had a different, darker past. That's the reason to get in there and fool around with it. You can explore it and be safe and relaxed. That's why I'm a fairly happy person, because I've made all these horrible movies with people getting

killed."

Complex and gory effects sequences are nothing new in a horror film. VAMPIRES demanding stunt-action scenes are. "The challenge when you're doing action," said Sandy King "is that if you're doing it right, it takes more equipment and more people to cover it. You have to take an extra moment and not get freaked out by what you're blowing up. It's still one frame at a time."

James Woods described the destruction of the location of the motel massacre: "It was a huge explosion, flames 40 feet in the air," he said. "I was told to just walk away from the motel and when I hit this line in the sand to brace myself so I wouldn't flinch when it blew. It was wild," he laughed. In another sequence, Woods said, Crow is "being dragged across the floor on top of this female vampire, who's been stabbed through the heart and shot with arrows. I'm shooting her with a 9mm special gun, and then she blows up in flames. All in a day's work for a vampire slayer."

Taking a lead from the Asian films that inspired BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA, Carpenter endows Valek with the capacity for flying leaps. "To get that effect, we put him on a crane and off he went," said the director. "I'm always nervous about putting anybody in a potentially dangerous situation, but Thomas is, as they say in stunt parlance, 'real handy.'"

Thomas Ian Griffith was thrilled with the chance to do the risky stunt himself. "I'm a very physical guy, and John was great," the actor told. They rehearsed my double all day so they could catch him right at sunset. I sat next to John so I could watch the monitor, and he just turns to me and goes 'You wanna do it?' And of course, I'm just going 'Oh yeah.' I ran up there, strapped on the harness, and went for it. I think it helps a lot, because that works for the audience when they see a stunt and can think, 'Wow, that's the real guy.'"

LAST LIGHT/NIGHT—In the ground, a stirring of a loosely covered mound of dirt. Hands crawling upward. Valek

slowly rises from his sleeping place. The last sigh of light disappears from the distant hills. Slowly Valek turns, SEVEN PAIRS OF TALONED HANDS begin clawing at dirt behind him. One by one, SEVEN MASTERS rise out of the ground and stand. FOUR MEN, THREE WOMEN. The undead, and the most powerful vampires on Earth.

—From John Carpenter's *VAMPIRES* script

The rising of the vampires sequence is one of the most eerily effective in any recent film. All involved describe the actual filming of the sequence as far more frightening. "I'm claustrophobic," admitted Griffith. "It was a nightmare." For the scene, the eight performers were actually covered with over a foot of New Mexico desert. Stunt coordinator Jeff Imada said, "It's a very personal thing to face. You have to bring yourself down a few notches and keep yourself together." Griffith explained, "We were a foot under, and there was this little box over our faces so we could breathe, and a headset buried close by so we could hear a countdown. You're lying there going, 'Oh God, I can't breathe, please just call my name so I can rise.'" The actor, who happily flew 20 feet over a city street, describes the sequence as "physically, the most demanding thing I have ever done."

Beyond the effects makeup and the stunts, the cast also faced the demanding job of bringing their characters to life, or in some cases, undead life. Sheryl Lee admits to having some initial problems with Katrina's trance-states. "At the beginning I really didn't have a clue," she admitted. "John was wonderful. We did rehearsals, had discussions. A lot of times, trance states are done very passively. We decided that we didn't want to do anything passive." Carpenter said that Lee "had everything else nailed. On the trances, we sat down, talked it through. The idea was that she was a remote camera, that she could see through his eyes. I put all those scenes on tape and would show them to her before she would act, so she'd know what she was seeing.

ART VERSUS COMMERCE

"I've never understood people who don't understand the art part of this business. We don't do what we do just for a paycheck. We do it because we have passion about it."



Director Carpenter (right) discusses a scene with James Woods (left).

Lee said that her most difficult sequence was when Katrina "was in the bedroom of the motel. I was experiencing a really long trance, and I was physically tied up. Being tied up like that really does start to wear on you because you're trying to work within that confined space. You don't have the freedom to express yourself with your hands and arms. Holding that trance state for so long and having to come in and out of it—it was schizophrenic."

Lee was much more comfortable with bringing to life Katrina's gradual descent into vampirism. "I had to try and get into that deep hunger," she said. "Katrina is in that state all the time. Never satisfied, always fighting it." The long-time vegetarian would fast and then allow herself only a steak, cooked very rare. "I wanted to open those primal, instinctual places. It's not just that I'm hungry; it's that I've got to have that piece of meat." Admitting to a long-time fascination with vampires, Lee also read a number of vampire books, including *Zen and the Art of Slaying Vampires*. "It's a fantastic book. I would recommend it even if you aren't

going to be in a vampire movie," she laughed. "It has to do with how we deal with the light side and dark side that is in each of us."

Valek is not like the other masters you've hunted before. He is the first and most powerful, the progenitor of all other vampires on Earth. Their powers are dilutions of his.

—Cardinal Alba from John Carpenter's script

Thomas Ian Griffith had less problem finding his character. "I'd seen all the old movies and read some books," he said. "But this is Valek, the first vampire. It's an interesting character. Even when he's not on screen they're talking about him or chasing him. He drives the movie. You have to deliver, bigger than life, unstoppable."

Sheryl Lee described Griffith's Valek as "long jet black hair, all dressed in black with white skin and ice, ice blue eyes. The second he'd walk on the set, his presence was felt. When he would get into character you could feel it, chills up the back of your spine just to see him."

For Griffith, the character was there for him almost from the moment he donned makeup and costume designer Robin Michel Bush's wardrobe. "Most of the time you go into wardrobe and you just keep trying things on, saying to yourself 'This just isn't working.' This wasn't that way," he explained. "The first time I had the costume and makeup on it was 'Oh yeah, this is it.' The whole film was like that. The stars were aligned. It all came together right." As for how to portray the character's vampire nature, Griffith explained that "you talk to John Carpenter. Who knows more?"

One of the key elements of the film's approach to its title characters was conveying their unholy allure. Robin Michel Bush explained that "Sandy cast people that were gorgeous and sensual. Thomas exemplifies that. You just wanted to succumb. By the end of the movie, I think every woman on the set had gone to him and begged 'Would you please bite me.'" When these reactions are mentioned to Griffith he said, "Vampires are about that sexy, sensual taboo side, but you can't try and be sexy. You have to look on it as the ultimate sexual experience. Taking her life, drawing it from her. How did I approach it? Well, you take a look at Sheryl Lee, and then John says to you 'Hey, let's not bite her on the neck. Bite her on the inner thigh,' and I can relate to that."

Carpenter took an interesting approach to the Vampire Masters. Marjean Holden said, "He didn't want us to interact with the good guys, the main characters. He wanted that separation. We came in as a group and didn't meet anybody beforehand. With all of us in the same makeup and the same look, it bonded us with a vibe that separated us from everyone else." She was also impressed with the director's openness. "He's very collaborative. If your idea is good, then he wants to incorporate it. If not, he's got a suggestion like that. He's very quick. He's a master, really. He just knows how to make movies that you want to watch. It's a kick-ass film."

Holden was far from alone in

her praise for working with Carpenter. "He's the best director I've had the chance to work with," said Thomas Ian Griffith. "It was a great learning experience. Not just that he is such a master of this genre, but that he knows so much about film and about making movies. He's just a very bright guy." Sheryl Lee drew a quick comparison of Carpenter to her mentor, David Lynch: "People presume they will be dark, morbid people, and neither is. They are kind, warm, fun, generous people, and I think people don't expect that."

Similar praise was reserved for producer Sandy King. "I was sad when it ended," said Marjean Holden. "I didn't expect to be so connected to Sandy and John. Sandy is very different from a lot of producers. She's very much about the people and treating them with respect. It's a team, and being from an athletic background, I can really relate to that." Costume designer Robin Michel Bush pointed out that "Sandy makes your job so much easier because you're not stressed-out over a lot of issues. You just know that she has taken care of them, and that whatever else might come up, she'll will take care of that too."

The level of admiration that King and Carpenter receive from their casts and crew is the result of a shared philosophy of filmmaking. "It's all about 'we,'" Carpenter explained. "I'm not an autocrat, telling everyone this is my vision and it has to be this way. Everything goes



For the climax, Valek's band of Master Vampires invade a town for an O.K. Corral kind of showdown with Team Crow.

through me, but I delegate authority as much as I can. I let people do their jobs and we make decisions together."

To keep their crews happy King and Carpenter also promote an unusual amount of interaction amongst the participants. "Every couple of weeks or so," said Carpenter, "we have a boys night out. Everybody from top to bottom. Dinner, a bar, a strip club. Whatever we want to do. It's a bonding session. We sit, talk, share problems, get to know each other. The girls have nights out too. I think people respond to goodness as opposed to a tyrant." The accompanying sidebar on Sandy King details

her methods for keeping a happy crew, but she also has some unique ways to reduce personal stress.

Karin Costa has been King's friend since they were neighbors at the age of 2. She has also been John Carpenter's assistant for the past 11 years. She said, "We had two stages going in Santa Fe. One of the girls who was working for Greg [Nicotero] had this blood-filled super soaker." Costa borrowed the gun and walked up to Sandy who was doing 2nd unit work on the other stage. "Sandy was dressed in black and didn't realize it was blood at first and she threw some bottled water on me." Sandy King continued the story, "It was dark. You shoot a lot of dark on a vampire film. Karin laughed that I might have got her, but she got me with blood. Right then, one of Greg's guys handed me another super soaker of blood, and we ran from one stage to the other, just spraying blood and screaming appropriately horrendous language." Karin added, "You've got two 40-something women running around spraying the entire stage. At one point Sandy spun around to spray me and hit this truck. They had just spent, I think, two days aging the thing for a scene. It took another 24 hours to fix it. We stopped, looked at each other and both

thought we were dead. Then Sandy smiled and said, 'Wait a minute. I'm the producer.'" King continued, "This is one of the great perks of the job. Being able to use the blood super soakers and not get in trouble. It'll be in my contracts from now on."

Months after completing *VAMPIRES*, King and Carpenter may have wished for another stress relieving super soaker fight. Despite overwhelming positive responses to the film, it spent months in distribution limbo. "You make a movie, and then its like putting it up for adoption," King explained. "We don't have a lot of control. There were bids before we were done shooting," she continued, "and more after the first screening. It didn't sell for so long because of problems within Largo itself. Every company has a life that is totally outside your movie. I believe Largo was at a kind of crossroads in their corporate history. It was frustrating for us."

Carpenter added, "I've never understood people who don't understand the art part of this business. We don't get up and do what we do just for a paycheck—not just for that. We do it because we have a passion about it. A process of creativity. That's what people love. I don't see why people don't get that." □

Carpenter's film celebrates the professionalism and expertise of Crow's team while at the same time making them as ruthless as the vampires they hunt.



JOHN CARPENTER: C

Crafting a career of horror and fantasy derived from the "land of paranoia."

In France I'm an auteur. In Germany I'm a filmmaker. In the U.K. I'm a horror director....In the U.S. I'm a bum.—John Carpenter

John Carpenter's assessment of his position is characteristically pessimistic, self-effacing, and sadly accurate. From the quirky *DARK STAR* to the current *VAMPIRES*, Carpenter has seldom earned the critical kudos granted many of his contemporaries. Some critics have even compared his work to his surname—labeling him a craftsman, not an artist.

For forty-odd years, the accepted method of judging a director to be a true artist has been the auteur theory, which assesses a filmmaker by reviewing his body of work, or oeuvre. The conscious and unconscious creative decisions, interests, and obsessions of the mind behind the film should be revealed through recurring themes. They are the author's signature. With a career spanning over 20 years

BY
JOHN THONEN

and nearly that number of films, it's time to apply those standards to John Carpenter.

In a 1975 letter to *Photon* magazine, Carpenter said that "I think I'm still making home movies, just as I did when I was eight years old. These home movies, while containing some scraps and flashes of my own peculiar insulated, isolated view of the world, reflect mainly the strange dreams of an eight year old boy going to a darkened movie theater in Bowling Green, Kentucky. There is a strange union of fantasy and an oddball reality." Somewhere in that "strange union" is the seeds of the John Carpenter oeuvre.

Frequent homages to Hawks and other filmmakers, leave little doubt that Carpenter embraces the auteur theory, although he exhibits some ambiguity about applying it to himself. He once said, "My process

involves not analyzing my process. What I mean is, I try to operate purely on instinct." While he might prefer not to look too closely at his inner-workings, Carpenter acknowledges their existence. "I went through film school when the teachers were emphasizing making 'personal' films," he told me in a 1978 letter. "I have always tried to do that. Each of my pictures has something to do with me." He then added, "I really don't think I've ever consciously tried to develop an overall theme in my pictures. Unconsciously, I'm sure I have." Reminded of the 20 year old statement, Carpenter today added, "That reflected my thinking in 1978. It's changed a bit since. I abhor 'messages,' but themes—themes are vital." Carpenter's 1978 letter was signed, "From the land of isolation and paranoia." In many ways, that signatory phrase encapsulates the themes underlying his work.

Some have labeled the classic Carpenter character as the American Anti-Hero. It's a title



BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE

befitting Snake Plissken, Napoleon Wilson, or Jack Crow to be sure. Less sure, is the inclusion of Macready, Jack Burton, John Nada, Laurie Strode, Stevie Wayne, and most of the rest of Carpenter's protagonists. These characters are more than simple misanthropes. They are outsiders, even rebels, yet capable of functioning, even ex-

Then and Now: On the left, a young John Carpenter (sans mustache) sets up a shot; at right, Carpenter as he looks today on the set of his latest cinematic effort *VAMPIRES*.



CINEMA OF ISOLATION



THE CHINA (1977) is a typical Carpenter film involving an isolated outsider confronting inexplicable, irrational events in a plot that suggests a translated Western.

celling, in society. The connection among them is a mental and emotional isolation from all others. In the Carpenter cinematic universe, all men (and women) are an island.

The Carpenter outsider first showed in *THE RESURRECTION OF BRONCO BILLY*, a 1970 Academy Award winning USC short which Carpenter edited, scored, and co-wrote. The title character is a man out-of-sync with the world he lives in. With his John Wayne walk and Gary Cooper talk, Billy is sinking deeper and deeper into the fantasy world of a wild west that never existed outside of a Saturday Matinee. Unlike the cowboys he emulates, he is not isolated from his fellow beings by mountains or barren expanses of desert. People are everywhere around him. Yet, he is totally alone.

BRONCO BILLY also introduced another important element of the Carpenter oeuvre. The last shot of Billy, lost forever in his fantasy world, is not

one of a mindless lunatic. It is of a cowboy exiting into the sunset with all the triumph this cinematic myth-image entails. Time and again Carpenter will come to regale us with the image of personal victory in what might otherwise seem defeat: retaining one's individuality, not conforming to society and its rules, even at the cost of one's freedom, life, or sanity. This is a victory to the creative force behind Carpenter's films.

Carpenter lays no claim to being the auteur of *BRONCO BILLY*. As a co-writer, however, he certainly had creative input. The films that have followed make it clear that, whatever the input of others in the film, Billy was the progenitor of all of Carpenter's outsiders.

DARK STAR ('74) was a 40 minute USC short which Carpenter and co-writer Dan O'Bannon (*ALIEN*) expanded to feature length. The film places its characters in a much more literal isolation than

BRONCO BILLY's. As the crew of a deep space vessel, they are far removed from their natural world. Even within this microcosm, crammed into a working space the size of a closet, the crew remains isolated from each other. Talby sits in the observation dome trying to count the stars. Doolittle dreams of surfing and plays imaginary concertos on his homemade piano. Pinback? He's not even Pinback. He's a flight attendant forced on board by the real Pinback when he deserted the mission. At least that's who he thinks he is.

Pinback is the most isolated of the *DARK STAR* crew, and of any Carpenter character until *IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS*. Unlike *BRONCO BILLY*, Carpenter does not present Pinback's madness as a victory. This is a man who has lost even himself. To Carpenter, this failure to be true to one's self is the ultimate defeat. While clearly half-insane, Doolittle is the film's

protagonist. With the spaceship destroyed, he fulfills his surfing dreams as he rides a piece of wreckage off into the ocean of stars. Victorious in death. All to the tune of Carpenter's delightfully incongruous country western song, *Benson, Arizona*.

Beyond reinforcing Carpenter's theme of isolation, *DARK STAR* also introduces another element of the director's oeuvre: the sure and certain failure of civilization's most revered institutions. Over the course of his career, Carpenter will repeatedly skewer the very cornerstones of civilization; in the John Carpenter universe, man's modern icons—religion, science, law, government—are all destined to fail or betray us. In *DARK STAR* the threat isn't alien monsters or marauding space pirates, it's faulty computers, murderous consoles, and neurotic talking bombs. In this malfunctioning metallic world, science is no boon to man. It's a threat.



In Carpenter's films, humanity's institutions typically fail to live up to their promise of providing safety. For example, in *VAMPIRES*, the evil Valek is a former member of the Catholic Church, who has no aversion to crosses and evil, kneels as if in prayer.

ASSAULT ON PERCENT 13 (1976) found Carpenter wasting little time in isolating his characters. In a soon-to-close police house, in a deserted urban renewal area, a handful of police officers and prisoners are besieged by a throng of gang members. In the midst of one of the world's largest cities, it takes only a few snips at the power and phone lines for the station house to become as remote a stronghold as any old west calvary fort. In moments the cities fade as a testament to man's accomplishments, and the laws the precinct house represents are instantly meaningless. It is survival of the fittest in a world without rules.

Though the film is very much an ensemble piece, convict Napoleon Wilson is the expected outsider. He doesn't fit in with those who have imprisoned him, nor with his fellow convicts. He is presented as a legendary criminal, yet we are told nothing about his illegal acts. This lack of back story heightens the feel that it is the man, and not his actions, that have isolated Napoleon from the world. Carpenter would later use the same technique with Snake Plissken. If one imagines Napoleon with a few more years and a few more skin-of-his-teeth escapes, it's easy to

picture him as Plissken.

The Carpenter universe became more clearly defined with *ASSAULT*. The death of the innocent (initially a child) became a recurring motif in the director's oeuvre. That innocence can also be the naivete of adults such as Julie and Officer Chaney, who put their faith in the system. When the system fails, they are unable to adapt to what is happening, and it costs them their lives.

The director isn't interested in the reasons for the attack. In

an interview he said, "I didn't want any political or social message at all. The evil outside was totally irrational and senseless." As Napoleon Wilson puts it, "They never know the reason. Reasons don't matter." The attackers are virtually faceless and devoid of character. Carpenter isn't commenting on social issues. He is saying, through the voice of Wilson, that "There is no safety anywhere."

Carpenter once said that Snake Plissken, Napoleon Wilson, and John Nada were all the

same character, and all a part of him. He recently elaborated to me, "That's me, but it's the dark me. These are my alter egos. Who I imagine I would be if I had a different, darker past." Napoleon Wilson provides one of the purest voices for the dark philosophy of the director's alter egos. "A man with faith," he marvels at Captain Bishop. "A rare quality. I believe in one man." The world according to John Carpenter, finds each of us reliant only on ourselves, while buffeted by the winds of random chaos. Indeed, this is the land of isolation and paranoia.

ASSAULT is a conscious homage to Howard Hawks. As such, parts of the film mimic the Hawks oeuvre at the expense of Carpenter's own viewpoint. Hawks' films frequently dealt with a team of rather average people facing an external threat. Having matured in the time of the great World Wars, Hawks had faith in the value of a team effort. There was always degrees of conflict within the Hawks team (e.g., the scientists and the military in 1951's *THE THING*), but they ultimately pulled together. Carpenter, who grew up in the rebellious '60s, with the disillusionment of Vietnam, has faith only in the individual. While he would frequently return to the idea of the team, *ASSAULT* is a rare instance where his team triumphs.

ASSAULT was a European

THE FOG (1978) was Carpenter's first film to explicitly portray the failure of civilization's cherished icons, such as the cross.



"I went to film school when the teachers were emphasizing personal films. I have always tried to do that. Each picture has something to do with me."

hit and a critical success, but it was HALLOWEEN that put Carpenter on the map. Twenty years later, it certainly reinforces the director's themes of the isolated outsider (Laurie Strode) the random, faceless threat (the shape) and the failure of our institutions (the police, psychiatry), but it adds little new to the Carpenter oeuvre. What was new was the attempt of many critics to unjustly graft a new theme onto Carpenter.

Not long after its release, one critic dubbed HALLOWEEN a "Mainstream Simulated Snuff Movie." Many agreed. They felt the film portrayed a puritanical attitude that justified the death of promiscuous girls while rewarding Laurie Strode for her virginity. When Carpenter's film was followed by a tsunami of misogynistic slasher movies, it became identified with their regrettable traits. A quick glance at the director's TV-movie SOMEONE IS WATCHING ME (also 1978) shows the error of the association.

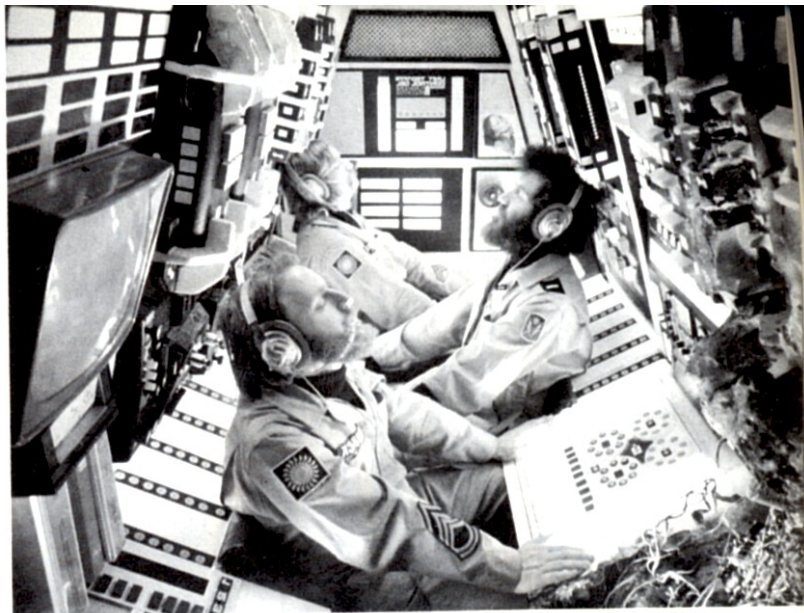
Isolation, paranoia, and the failure of society to protect us are all themes in the movie. Filmed before HALLOWEEN's release, but not televised until afterward, SOMEONE offers interesting parallels to Carpenter's best known film. Both deal with a homicidal maniac with a penchant for young, single women. Also in both, the killer meets his match in the form of one of those potential victims. Leigh Michaels (Lauren Hutton) is fresh from an affair with a married man, has an executive level job, a platonic friendship with a lesbian co-worker, and is open to a new, sexually active relationship—hardly the subservient, virginal Laurie Strode. Clearly, it is not their sexual proclivities that brought Carpenter to award Laurie or Leigh with survival. They are victorious because they are true to their inner selves, refusing to

bend to the roles society has ascribed to them.

John Carpenter returned to the small screen in 1979 with ELVIS, a major ratings success. Although Carpenter has bemoaned the lack of directorial control on TV, the film's themes are the same as those of ASSAULT. Here, however, the attack is on a single man, and he will not triumph. Elvis was an outsider in both his personal and public life. Adored by millions, he suffered a tragic isolation surpassed only by that of Howard Hughes. Wealth, success, love, fame, all these cherished tenets of modern life, failed to protect the man from losing himself. Surrounded by an entourage designed to both protect him and carry out his every wish, Elvis ended up a man with no control of his life.

The most powerful moment is when Elvis is talking to his still-born twin brother, represented by Elvis' own shadow. Carpenter and Russell improvised a scene where Elvis reaches out to touch the shadow—symbolically reaching out to touch himself, a person he has somehow lost along the way. When viewed as a Carpenter character rather than as an actual person, Elvis is more akin to Pinback in DARK STAR or Trent from IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS. They represent the consequences of allowing situations or society to turn you into something you are not.

ELVIS marked the end of the first stage of Carpenter's career. It had been a remarkable ride. He had won an Academy Award while still in college, seen another college effort gain theatrical release (unheard of at the time) become a directorial star overseas, made one of the most financially successful films in history and one of the most watched movies in TV history. Up to this point, Carpenter had done almost every-



Carpenter Redux, from top to bottom: anti-social astronauts at work in DARK STAR, Carpenter's first feature; Karen Allen and Jeff Bridges in the adult ET story STARMAN; and the strange brood of children conceived during a blackout, in the less-than-successful remake of the classic VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED.



The Shape has some fun in Carpenter's HALLOWEEN, a film that influenced a decade's worth of inferior copycats.

thing right. In Hollywood, that means you're ripe for a fall. Carpenter was like a rock act that sells 12 million albums, only to be called a has-been when the next peaks at 6 million. John Carpenter had become a hard act to follow.

Though certainly not Carpenter's best work, *THE FOG* ('80) still exhibits the creative traits of the mind behind it. The film is the director's first abject essay on the institution of religion. Within minutes we know that Father Malone's only faith is in the bottle. Unlike many films, Carpenter will offer no last-minute salvation for his fallen priest. Neither do the

walls of the church or the icon of the cross offer the expected sanctuary. The director also takes a few potshots at government, in the form of the town's deceitful and murderous founding fathers. Prior to this film, the icons of civilization had often failed man. This is his first presentation of betrayal by them. From this point on, Carpenter's depiction of these icons became less pragmatic and increasingly more cynical. While not overpowering, this cynicism is palpable when Nick Castle tells Elizabeth, "I don't believe in luck, good or bad. I don't believe in much of anything." It could easily be Napoleon Wil-

son speaking.

Stevie Wayne (Adrienne Barbeau) provides an interesting variation on the Carpenter outsider. Beautiful, likable, independent and loving, she seems well adjusted to the world. Yet she has chosen an isolated home in a remote town and taken an all-consuming job as owner and sole employee of a radio station located atop a distant lighthouse. As if that wasn't enough, Carpenter visually heightens her isolation by allowing her contact with others only by phone, and the one-way communication of her broadcasts. Only one brief scene depicts her with another person, and even it is suspect.

THE FOG has a dream-like quality that is underlined by opening with a quote from Edgar Allan Poe: "Is all that we see or seem but a dream within a dream?" It may be reading too much into it, but it seems significant that in Stevie's only moment of direct human contact, she has just awakened. Perhaps from a dream? Perhaps hers is the ultimate isolation. Stevie Wayne's entire world, and hence the entire film, is but a dream.

THE FOG wasn't really a bad film. It just didn't measure up to what had preceded it. It featured an ensemble cast, yet didn't let them get close to each other until the final moments. Although it offered a strong female character, the film relegated her and everyone else, to being largely observers instead of active participants. When the external threat is resolved, it is not as a result of any of the character's actions, but simply a loose brick that unveils the ugly secret of the town fathers. The random nature of this solution, and the largely ineffectual actions of the ostensible heroes, is in keeping with the director's oeuvre, but emotionally it is less than satisfying.

The recurrence of Carpenter's themes are apparent enough at this point to partially forego their film-by-film enumeration. This also marks a good point to consider why Carpenter began to lose the respect he had previously commanded. From this point on, mainstream critics would seem to enter each Carpenter screening with a chip on their shoulder. As he once explained, "People think of horror like pornography. They tend to look down on you, so if you try and do any serious work you often don't get taken as seriously as you want to be." To many critics and industry insiders, *THE FOG* seemed to confirm that Carpenter and his films didn't merit serious consideration. It's a critical perspective he has never fully escaped.

Although a lesser achievement artistically, *THE FOG* was quite profitable, allowing Carpenter to move up a notch in budget for 1981's *ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK*. The film finds the government and the

law as societal institutions betraying us and Snake Plissken—an extreme example of the director's cherished outsiders. Snake is Carpenter's most fascinating creation. Philosophically, he is existentialism gone wild. He communicates no more than he must, shows no interest in establishing relationships, and offers loyalty only to himself. Before the film is over Snake, Brain, Maggie, and Cabbie have become another example of the failed team, with Cabbie's death again reflecting the innocent. All that Carpenter has shown us before is taken to the extreme here. While not exactly desirable, Snake would prove hard to forget—a fact that did nothing to dispel the growing critical hostility toward Snake's creator.

Snake Plissken is a prime example of another obstacle in the way of Carpenter earning critical respect. As a film artist, and film score composer, he falls into a style that some call primitivism. While technically proficient, he relies on instinct, utilizing a simple and straight forward story and character structure. He once explained that "My whole philosophy is that movies are not intellectual. They are not ideas. That is done in literature and all sorts of other forms. Movies are emotional." Film critics have never taken well to primitives because it rejects the very nature of criticism. Proponents of the form, such as Sam Peckinpah, Samuel Fuller, and Cornel Wilde often exhibited more than disdain for the intellectualizing of their work; they bordered on abhorrence. Peckinpah and Fuller were well past their prime when critics began to acknowledge their art, and Wilde (*THE NAKED PREY*, *NO BLADE OF GRASS*), like Carpenter, has yet to receive recognition.

The tenets of the director's oeuvre are readily apparent in 1982's *THE THING*. The film's Arctic researchers are every bit as isolated, and their relationships as discordant, as the crew of the Dark Star. Taking this element one step further, Macready, our protagonist, is a man living in the most isolated place on earth, yet choosing to live separately from the handful of humans still near him.

With the possible exception

"I don't think I have an overall theme," said Carpenter twenty years ago. Today his "thinking has changed. I abhor messages, but themes—themes are vital."



Sam Neill (*JURASSIC PARK*) is the image of isolation and paranoia in John Carpenter's *IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS*, a tribute to the horror fiction of H.P. Lovecraft.

of *PRINCE OF DARKNESS*, *THE THING* is the best realized example of the unfathomable threats that the filmmaker sees the universe hurling at man. Few films have so effectively driven home science fiction's recurring concepts of the loss of identity and the anxiety of being unable to trust anyone. Isolation, paranoia, an unfathomable threat, the failure of a team effort to resist it, a strong dose of random chaos, and an ending that can only offer victory in death—you don't need to read the credits to know that *THE THING* is a John Carpenter film.

Unfortunately, audiences floating on *ET*'s wave of interstellar good will, stayed away in droves. The critics, lying in wait for the past several Carpenter films, had a field day. *THE THING* wasn't critiqued; it was

vilified. Its director wasn't criticized; he was crucified. Soon, his films would become even more sardonic. First, however, he would make an effort to gain mainstream recognition, and in so doing, reveal a lighter side of his oeuvre.

Though an enjoyable ride, *CHRISTINE* ('83) is probably Carpenter's most lightweight effort. Today, he largely disdains it as a work-for-hire. "I needed a job and that was the only one I was offered," he told me. Still, this was at the zenith of Stephen King's influence as Name-Brand-Horror. An adaptation of his bestseller about a teenage boy and his possessed car, had to have appeal as a commercial project to reverse the setback of *THE THING*.

Carpenter had initially wanted to film King's novel *FIRESTARTER*. That book had

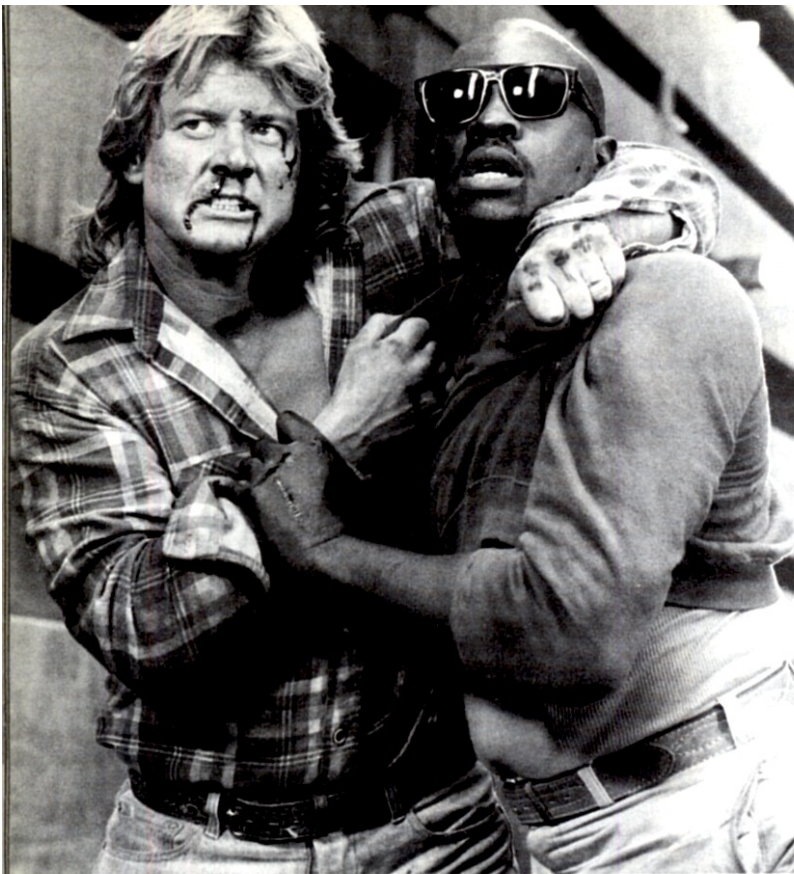
such a strong relationship to the director's themes that it's a shame he didn't get the chance. He did find his outsider alter ego in *CHRISTINE*'s nerdish Arnie Cunningham. Arnie's self-sacrificing demise, as he faces the ultimate defeat of losing himself to whatever inhabits his car, is once more the director recurring victory in death sub-text.

The milieu of high school life also seemed to strike a chord with the filmmaker, and those aspects of the story are probably its strongest. Regarding his frequent visits to the theme of isolation, Carpenter once told me, "I would agree in part with this theme of the individual and his isolation from society in my films. It may have to do with the isolation I personally have felt from society." In watching *CHRISTINE*, one can't help but wonder if the director felt those pangs of isolation most strongly during his own high school days.

The film's most significant nod to the director's classic themes lies in the only major change he made to the novel. King had offered a rather standard spirit possession to explain the automobile's evil nature. The film's auteur turned to his customary unknown force as the vehicle's driving force. As the opening song tells us, *Christine* is simply "Bad To The Bone."

CHRISTINE, like many of Carpenter's films, was neither a hit nor a flop. Critical reaction was mixed, but it was apparent that most reviewers were all too happy to relegate the director to the ghetto of horror filmmakers. His next film would prove how wrong they were.

STARMAN ('84) is Carpenter's most atypical film and the surest proof of his versatility as a storyteller. The film's opening sequence, a spacecraft approaching earth, virtually mirrors the opening of *THE THING*. It's hard to imagine that the scene wasn't deliberately intended by the director to present *STARMAN* as the flip side of his then still reviled film. *STARMAN*'s sweet romanticism seems at odds with the director's more frequently seen cynicism. Bear in mind that you have to have believed



Roddy Piper (left) and Keith David battle it out in John Carpenter's *THEY LIVE*, a throw back to the invasion-paranoia science fiction films of the 1950s.

Few films have so effectively driven home science fiction's recurring concepts of the loss of identity and the anxiety of being unable to trust anyone.

in something to ever lose faith in it. Ultimately, all cynics are merely fallen romantics. For *STARMAN*, Carpenter reached a little deeper into his psyche to offer the flip side of the same creative mind we saw in *THE THING*.

This is the rare Carpenter vehicle which he did not write or at least substantially rewrite. The script apparently met his criteria to show he could do

Alice Cooper pops up as a cameo in Carpenter's *PRINCE OF DARKNESS*, a science-fiction tale of chaos and evil.



something beyond the preset boundaries critics had saddled him with—all without losing many of his recurring themes. Obviously, this time around Jeff Bridges' interstellar visitor is the requisite outsider. Betrayal by the forces of society, the government, is likewise readily apparent in the story. Even the film's ending, which finds Jenny losing the man she loves for a second time, has some relation to the director's concept of victory in defeat and the death of the innocent. The director is traveling many of the same roads he has gone down before. It's the destination that's new.

Carpenter has often been criticized for the sometimes perfunctory acting in his films. *STARMAN* found him leading his performers to the finest work of their careers. Jeff Bridges earned a well-deserved Academy Award nomination with an interpretation so fine that he later copied it himself for *THE VANISHING*. As fine as Bridges is here, Karen Allen is equally strong and is as much an outsider as Starman, since Carpenter allows her little direct communication with anyone but him. Hers is a reactive role, and hence less showy, but it provides the film's heart. Instead of

dazzling us with soulless special effects, as Ron Howard would soon do in the slightly similar *COCOON*, Carpenter uses Allen's face and slightly sad eyes as a method to draw the audience into the film's emotional core. While the elements of Carpenter's oeuvre take a back seat here, the film should have proven to all his naysayers that, given the chance, here was a world class filmmaker. While moderately successful, the film failed to accomplish this. His next film would see him traveling familiar highways to yet another very different destination.

BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA ('87) is a light-hearted and often light-headed tale filled with magic, demons, monsters, and Kurt Russell's amusing take-off on John Wayne. There are traces of the classic Carpenter elements, however. The forces behind Wo Pan (James Hong), and the magic that permeates the film, are certainly of the unknown and unfathomable nature. While seen from a different viewpoint than most Carpenter protagonists, Jack Burton is no less an outsider than Napoleon Wilson. He clearly doesn't belong in this Asian adventure, but he seems equally out of place everywhere else. Before arriving in Chinatown, Burton barrels along in his semi-truck, blabbering macho gibberish into his CB radio, talking to unseen and probably non-existent listeners. The entire film could easily be just some fantasy Burton is jabbering out into the CB wasteland. If Bronco Billy had grown up watching Hong Kong movies instead of westerns, this would be the same out-of-sync guy operating in a different fantasy world.

It's anybody's guess what went wrong when *BIG TROUBLE* hit theaters. Few films have seemed as certain a crowd-

pleaser. Though the film's Asian cinematic inspirations are pretty apparent today, it was a unique experience a decade before Hong Kong mania struck the U.S. packed with action, effects, a sweet disposition and a cadre of charming performances, it should have been a sure hit. Instead, audience reaction mirrored Jack Burton's, "I'm supposed to buy this shit." We may never see this delightfully light side of Carpenter's creative personality again.

Whatever goodwill *STARMAN* may have mustered for the director, *BIG TROUBLE*'s failure sent him quickly back to the ranks of workmanlike horror specialists. He would return to that genre for his next film. A film that was in almost all ways a complete rejection of everything that had made *STARMAN* so unique an entry in his oeuvre.

Within minutes of the opening of *PRINCE OF DARKNESS*, its viewpoint is established. A university professor tells his students, "Say good-bye to classical reality, because our logic collapses on the subatomic level into ghosts and shadows. We've sought to impose order on the universe. While order does exist in the universe, it is not at all what we had in mind."

PRINCE assembles a diverse group of people in yet another Carpenter microcosm: an abandoned church where they are to study an unknown, perhaps apocalyptic object. Like the Dark Star crew, they are a team divided. They quickly split into differing camps of religious views and varying schools of science. Even within these subgroups there is no unity, no personal relationships. These are selfish, lifeless, soulless people. There is a hint of a developing relationship between Catherine



Frequent Carpenter collaborator Kurt Russell discovers the aftermath of an escaped alien menace in the 1982 remake of Howard Hawk's *THE THING*.

(Lisa Blount) and Brian (Jameson Parker), but it's obvious it will go nowhere. Even Catherine's act of self-sacrifice, a brief promise of victory in death, proves to be futile. Everyone here is an outsider. Everyone is alone. All actions are pointless. *PRINCE* begins with disharmony and descends into total chaos.

The film's title conjures biblical images of gothic demons, but Carpenter was inspired by a fascination with the theories of quantum mechanics. Not even those who have studied such theories for years can agree on just what they mean. It would be idiotic to address the topic here. Suffice it to say that one viewpoint is that the concept shows that the universe, as we know it, is based on chance and randomness at least on the subatomic level—and perhaps at higher levels as well. The appeal of the philosophy in the Carpenter oeuvre is obvious.

Like *BIG TROUBLE*, *PRINCE OF DARKNESS* is es-

entially an homage to a foreign sub-genre of fantastic films. This time, it's Italian horror movies. Those films frequently eschewed logic in favor of mood, atmosphere, and periodic shock sequences built around bizarre and gruesome deaths. They are often eerily effective as horror, though unsatisfying when judged by more dramatic criteria. Carpenter followed the same formula with similar results. The end product is one of the darkest films ever made by a major U.S. director. The film is often unsettling and legitimately frightening. It is, at once, one of the director's weakest films, yet also the purest and most absolute expression of the elements that make up the Carpenter cinematic universe. In the world Carpenter created in *PRINCE*, more than just the crowning achievements of civilization are failing man. The entire universe is. The film tells us that we are beyond insignificant in the universe and that there is nothing we can do about it.

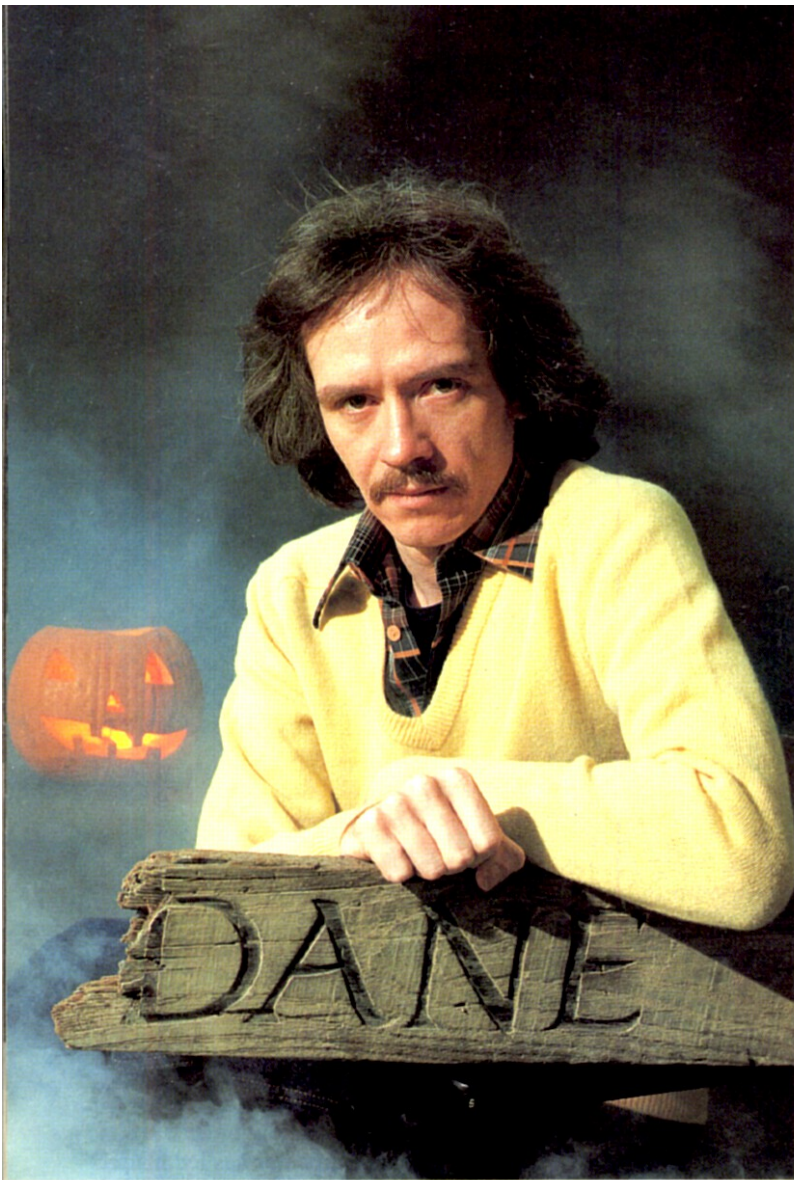
PRINCE OF DARKNESS goes beyond pessimism and cynicism. The film is utterly nihilistic, and damn proud of it.

THEY LIVE ('88) is certainly not as dark as *PRINCE* (few films are), but it's still far removed from the warmth of *STARMAN* or the joy of *BIG TROUBLE*. The story finds unemployed laborer John Nada (Roddy Piper) caught up in a resistance movement which reveals that our entire culture is supplanted by aliens. *THEY LIVE*, *THE THING*, *PRINCE OF DARKNESS*, and *IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS* all deal with an overwhelming external force that views man as insignificant. As the film's street preacher tells, "Outside the limit of our sight, feeding off of us, perched on top of us from birth to death, are our owners. They're all about you, all around you." The idea is pure H.P. Lovecraft and a perfect companion to the isolation and paranoia so many of Carpenter's films espouse. Once

again Carpenter has led his protagonist to a victorious death. Unlike *PRINCE*, Nada had at least accomplished something in doing so. The most positive aspect of the film is the return of victory in death. In *PRINCE*, Carpenter reminded us of how insignificant we are in the universe. In *THEY LIVE*, he suggests that on the smaller scale of our own world or country, each of us can still make a difference. It's a view far less pessimistic than that in *PRINCE* but still far from optimistic.

The nihilism of *PRINCE* and the cynicism of *THEY LIVE* seemed to act as a catharsis for Carpenter. His next film found him again with a major studio in pursuit of mass market success. The result was the first genuine misfire of his career, *MEMOIRS OF AN INVISIBLE MAN* ('91). The film was a pet project of star Chevy Chase, who envisioned it as his ticket to respect as a dramatic actor. Carpenter was understandably intrigued as well. H.F. Saint's

“Sometimes, the question comes down to: ‘Do you think real life is like this?’ Yes and no. In some ways, I know better; in some ways thank God I don’t.”



Above: the director in a publicity shot at the time of *THE FOG*. Below: even team leader Jack Crow (James Woods) in *VAMPIRES*, though obviously no loner, is isolated from his Hawks-like group of comrades (including Daniel Baldwin, wearing blue shirt).



source-novel had suggested that, even before the industrial accident that made Nick Halloway transparent to the human eye, he was already an invisible member of society. He functions just fine, but has no close friends, no loving relationships. He is Lennon and McCartney's *NOWHERE MAN* personified—certainly in keeping with the classic John Carpenter outsider.

The film gives no real explanation for the accident that makes Nick invisible, making it a somewhat more benign version of the director's recurring concept of the unknown threat. There are government agents in pursuit of Nick, who is literally a walking secret weapon. This provides the film's theme of betrayal by society's institutions. Even the film's ending, which finds a still invisible Nick & his new found love living in seclusion, was a more light-hearted version of victory in defeat. Clearly the film contained suffi-

cient elements of the Carpenter oeuvre for the director to make it his own and sufficient elements of humor, drama, and pathos for it to achieve its star's goal as well. Unfortunately, the film is perhaps the first of which Carpenter ever lost control. The studio wanted a typical Chevy Chase comedy; Carpenter wanted to do the film he and Chase had agreed upon; by all reports, Chase had no idea what he wanted to do. Carpenter told me, "I agree...I lost control of *MEMOIRS*.... [It's] flat, derivative, bland. Chevy Chase was, above all things, afraid. His fear kept him a prisoner. He wanted to do something good, but was too frightened to try."

Carpenter's next project was a TV anthology for Showtime cable. *BODY BAGS* ('93) would seem to be the director's attempt to regain the control he had lost on *MEMOIRS*. His company produced the film; he directed two segments and played the part of the film's post-mortem host. Isolation and paranoia certainly play a part in the opening segment at the gas station, but overall the segments are too short and too derivative to show many elements of the director's oeuvre.

Along with *THE THING* and *PRINCE OF DARKNESS*, 1995's *IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS* was the third of Carpenter's H.P. Lovecraft trilogy. The film's story of a horror writer, whose novels unhinge both the reader's mind and a portal to another dimension, is a clever one. Filled with Carpenter's patented visuals, it evokes a tension and mood that few others can match. This is one of the director's coldest and most cynical offerings. That point is driven home by an exchange between Trent (Sam Neil) and his reluctant companion Styles. "Anybody's capable of any-

thing. If you can think of it, they've done it," says Trent. Styles responds, "Doesn't leave you much to believe in." Trent's retort would be perfect in Snake Plissken's mouth, "Yeah, but think of the upside. At least it doesn't leave you too much to be disappointed in. The sooner we're off the planet the better."

Trent is certainly an outsider. He trusts and cares for no one and finds pleasure only in outwitting others in their attempts to deceive his insurance company employers. The force beyond the film's rather literal doorway to hell, is just as clearly one of an unknown and unfathomable type. The world that exists at the film's end is most certainly one of random chaos in which man has become an insignificant pawn. The depiction of Carpenter's vision of the ultimate defeat, the loss of one's self, is taken to its ultimate extreme as the entire world loses its mind.

The lack of a conventional protagonist, or even an unconventional rebel like Plissken, leaves the film more than a little cold-hearted. Otherwise, this is an interesting journey to one of its director's darker locales. Or, as the closing credits tell us, "Human interaction was monitored by the Interplanetary Psychiatric Association. The body count was high, the casualties are heavy."

Early in his career Carpenter was rather disdainful of sequels and remakes. By the mid-'90s, he would do one of each back to back. 1995's *VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED* starts out quite promisingly, with an eerie and moody opening 20 minutes. Then it all begins to fall apart. The problem may be that after introducing the themes we are accustomed to, Carpenter abandoned them.

The story, which should have been about David and his mother, becomes hopelessly mired in characters who should have been secondary. The proper elements are present and their relationships properly set up. One has to wonder if the availability of "names" like Christopher Reeves and Kirstie Alley didn't change the structure of the film to emphasize their characters. No matter what the reason, the early promise of *VILLAGE* is sadly unrealized.

There's not a great deal to



The horror in Carpenter's films is often either unexplained (*CHRISTINE*, above) or inexplicable (*IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS*, below).

say about *ESCAPE FROM L.A.* It is no more and no less, than a larger budgeted remake of *ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK*. Everything is bigger, but little is better. It works better on TV where its weak CGI effects are less bothersome and the often slow pace less frustrating. Although fan reaction was largely negative, younger viewers, largely unfamiliar with the original, seem to like it quite a bit. The film is a reminder that the director's themes have hardly softened with time. Only a failed romantic like Carpenter could envision the ending, which features all of mankind being thrown back into stone age, as justifiable, even desirable. *ESCAPE FROM L.A.* holds the same place, sans a large measure of freshness, in the director's oeuvre, as Plissken's first adventure did. That fact hurt it as entertainment, but it clearly reinforces all of the themes that Carpenter's work has reflected.

VAMPIRES is still awaiting its stateside release at the time of publication, but the film's script gives ample evidence of the classic Carpenter themes. Both the failure of, and later betrayal by, an icon of civilization is certainly a factor in the film. Likewise, the embrace of chaos as the guiding force of the universe is apparent when Katrina

asks why she had to be the victim of the vampire's bite. The answer is "...there is no fucking reason. Why you? I don't know, and nobody fuckin' knows, because it isn't a 'why' question. Why you, why me, why anybody? Because somebody was in the wrong place at the wrong fuckin' time!" This could be the response of Napoleon Wilson, Snake Plissken, or Macready, Trent, or almost any Carpenter protagonist, and it would ring as true.

Early reviews of its European opening and advance previews in this country promise a return to form for the director after his back-to-back misfires. It would certainly be heartening to see him make a comeback akin to the one Wes Craven found in *SCREAM*. Whatever the results of *VAMPIRES*, or future Carpenter efforts, there can be no doubt that he has shown an artistic presence throughout his career that few others can claim. A decade from now fresh eyes will look back on the Carpenter oeuvre and he will likely emerge as one of the most respected filmmakers of his generation. Why wait?

In a closing disclaimer, I should note that the auteur theory does not pretend to paint a picture of the actual person. I have interviewed Carpenter several times, as well as many of



his collaborators, and he is very much a team player—certainly no Snake Plissken. I do believe the study of a filmmaker's oeuvre offers an image of a part of the man, that portion wherein the creative forces dwell—the "insulated, isolated view of...of an eight year old boy," as I quoted earlier. Carpenter concluded that letter with, "Sometimes the question comes down to: 'Do you think life is like this?' Yes and no. In some ways I know better, and in some ways, thank God, I don't." □

THE TRUMAN SH



A science fiction blockbuster with brains.

THE PRISONER meets KNOT'S LANDING via George Orwell in THE TRUMAN SHOW. Jim Carrey's change-

of-pace science-fiction comedy gave the star his best opportunity so far to shine, playing the unknowing lead of the world's most watched TV soap opera. With excellent supporting performances from Ed Harris and Laura Linney, along with superb direction by Peter Weir and unique scripting by Andrew Niccol, THE TRUMAN SHOW is an ingenious concept flawlessly executed from start to finish.

The script had been knocking around Hollywood for a while before landing in Weir's lap. Niccol, who went on to write and direct GATTACA, knew when he sold TRUMAN to Paramount that he wouldn't be considered to direct. "But that was fine," he said. "For the idea of THE TRUMAN SHOW to work properly, it needed a lot of money spent on it, and they wouldn't have risked such an investment on an untried unknown. Peter Weir was by far the best choice to direct, and I

couldn't have been happier. Our collaboration was total, and it was a pure joy to work with him."

Weir, the celebrated Australian director of THE LAST WAVE and the recently re-released PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK, read Niccol's script just after finishing FEARLESS in 1993. He remarked, "That was an emotionally tough film to make, and it took me a good year to get back to normal, lead a private life, and take the kids to school. I started looking around for something to get my creative juices flowing again but couldn't find anything. Every script I was offered I'd seen before. I was hungry for something different and challenging. I kept telling producers, 'Look I'm not joking. Send me something half-done, broken, or in need of extensive rewriting—just send me something with some meat on it.' Fortunately one producer listened to me and sent over THE TRUMAN SHOW."

He continued, "I loved it so much—it was exactly what I was looking for. So much so that

by
Alan Jones

I got scared. Andrew Niccol is a genius, and I'm happy to acknowledge that publicly. The script haunted me. Sometimes when you love a script so much you re-read it to get back the initial mood you felt. With THE TRUMAN SHOW it kept playing games in my mind. I'd pick up a newspaper and read about the latest media violation and think, *Just like THE TRUMAN SHOW!* Or a friend would be making observations about a TV program and I'd say, 'Have you read THE TRUMAN SHOW?' Although the idea was set in the future—roughly 20 years away, I'd say—it was still a reflection of the highly disturbed and confusing times we are currently living through."

Weir acknowledged the involvement of Jim Carrey as the vital component that got the film made without any compromise. He explained, "To make THE TRUMAN SHOW work, it needed someone with Jim's clout and enormous drawing power. Paramount was not going to risk \$80 million on any of the four stars I was going to

choose. Jim was the total package, and I was gratified he wanted to join us on the journey." Without him, the idea would have been scaled down to a cheap TWILIGHT ZONE episode simply focusing on whether Truman was paranoid or not."

It was in 1995 that producer Scott Rudin called up Weir and asked if he'd heard of Carrey. "That was not an unreasonable way to put it at the time, either," the director remarked, "as ACE VENTURA had only just been released and was hardly a film people of my generation were flocking to see. When I did catch it, I thought Jim had the quality of a young Buster Keaton. He was edgy and reckless, and I knew then that casting him in THE TRUMAN SHOW was a brilliant idea."

Principal photography began on December 9, 1996, at Seaside, Florida. Weir's wife, visual consultant Wendy Stites, brought the planned community to his attention after finding a photo spread on the hamlet in a magazine. "It looked like it had been purposely built for our show," said the director. "With a

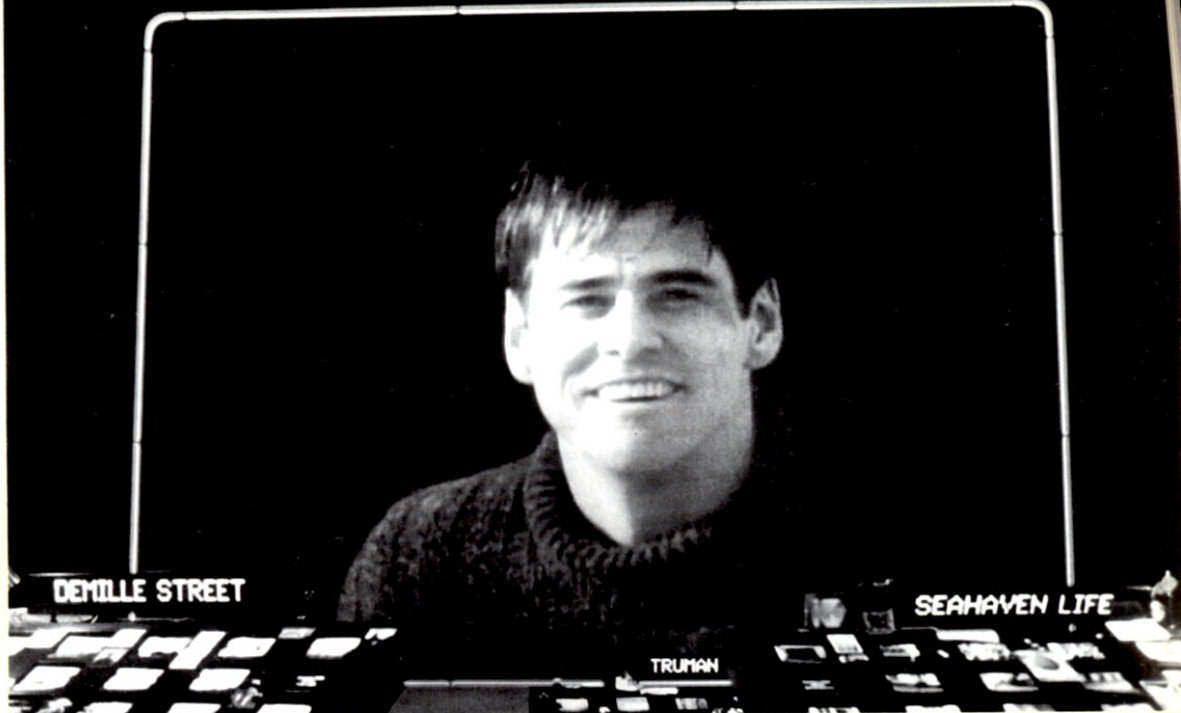
OW

little enhancement we created Seahaven, the ideal setting for Truman's 'perfect' life."

To play Truman's perfect wife, Weir chose Laura Linney (CONGO). Because Linney plays an actress playing a part, she did a lot of preparation for the role. She said, "I didn't want to get confused over where I was supposed to be at any given time. I have to thank Peter Weir because he inspired us all to have fun with our back stories. In my case, I was actress Hannah Gill playing Meryl Burbank, and we had hours of fun conversation figuring out what she was really like, how much she was paid, what her contract allowed her to do and why she finally loses it on air."

She continued, "My take on Meryl/Hannah was that she doesn't like Truman. She's a rabidly ambitious actress, and her ego is way out of control. But the pressure of having her screen husband falling in love with a picture collage of Sylvia/Lauren [Natascha McElhone] is putting her career in jeopardy. She could be written out of the show at any minute, so she tries everything in her power to keep the illusion from faltering or else she'll lose her star status. So that makes her smile a little broader and her manner become more desperate. Then of course she gets angry in an out-of-character way.

Laura Linney plays Truman's brittle wife—or rather, the actress playing his wife—who loses her characterization when Truman starts to ask questions.



Jim Carrey scored a major hit as Truman Burbank, whose every moment (unknown to him) is broadcast live as part of a TV show. Opposite page: Ed Harris plays Christof, who directs *The Truman Show* from behind the facade of a moon.

It's all primal-level stuff."

Linney's favorite parts of the movie were the product placements supposedly done in such a way that Truman will never notice. She laughed, "I loved doing those and based them on the actions of game hostesses in the TV show 'Let's Make A Deal.' The way they presented products with grace and dignity always used to make me smile."

In Linney's estimation THE TRUMAN SHOW is about what people will do to make money. She added, "You can't categorize the movie, and that's one of its major strengths. It deals with the human spirit, violations of privacy and the stresses of being on television. Plus, it's dazzling to watch. I

don't like watching the movies I make usually, but what struck me most about this one was how beautiful it is to look at. That's Peter Weir again proving an inspiration and having a positive impact on everyone around him."

Christof, the inventor and manipulator of 'The Truman Show,' was originally going to be played by Dennis Hopper. But when he bowed out, Ed Harris (THE ABYSS) stepped in on short notice. The star said, "All my scenes were done at the end of the Florida shoot on an L. A. sound stage. I didn't have any scenes with Jim Carrey, but we met each other socially and I thought he was a great guy. It was a shame we didn't get to work together one-to-one."

Although Christof is a control-freak playing God from behind Seahaven's perfect moon, don't call him the villain. Harris argued, "I'm the antagonist, certainly, but not the villain. It's much more complicated than that. In a sense Christof has given Truman his life. He adopted this orphaned child to put him on a BRINGING UP BABY-type of show for a year. But because it was such a ratings success, the network insisted we keep on airing it. So by this time Christof is himself totally immersed in Truman's world, too. It's a world that's more real than the real one to

him. That's why I get so close to killing Truman because by that time I realize I love him too much."

Although a pointed religious subtext comes into play towards the climax, borne out by the very name Christof itself, Harris said he didn't play on that for his performance. "The hardest thing for an actor to play is a metaphor or a symbol. I merely played a human being who rules this little world and, as things get more urgent, tries to figure out what to do. I expect the audience to have ambivalent feelings towards me as I do blend compassion with a necessary evil."

As he did with Laura Linney, Peter Weir urged Harris to come up with a complex history for Christof. "He's as private as Truman is public," said Harris. "One of the thoughts I had when I was first asked to play the role was to give Christof something like a humped back—something that would make him shy. For if he was deformed in some way, he couldn't comfortably live in our world, which is why he fabricates another perfect one. In the end we didn't go that far as we all have our own little insecurities which make us feel isolated at some time or another. But I do feel I was on the right lines as Christof has totally retreated from the real world to live a shadowy existence as amplified



THE TRUMAN SHOW

REVIEW

A darkly comic view of media manipulation.

THE TRUMAN SHOW

A Paramount release of a Scott Rudin Production. Produced by: Rudin, Andrew Niccol, Edward S. Feldman, Adam Schroeder. Executive producer: Lynn Pleshette. Co-producer: Richard Luke Rothschild. Directed by: Peter Weir. Screenplay: Andrew Niccol. Camera: (Deluxe color): Peter Biziou. Editors: William Anderson, Lee Smith. Original Music: Burkhard Dallwitz. Additional original music: Philip Glass. Production Designer: Dennis Gassner. Special Design Consultant: Wendy Stites. Art Director: Richard L. Johnson. Special visual effects: Cinesite. MPA Rating: PG. Running time 102 Min.

Truman Burbank.....	Jim Carrey
Meryl.....	Laura Linney
Marlon.....	Noah Emmerich
Lauren/Sylvia.....	Natascha McElhone
Truman's Mother.....	Holland Taylor
Christof.....	Ed Harris
Truman's Father.....	Brian Delate
Chloe.....	Una Damon
Control Room Director.....	Paul Giamatti
Young Truman.....	Blair Slater

by Patricia Moir

The premise is both audacious and simple: in an unspecified time in the future, real-life television programming has reached its logical evolutionary conclusion, and audiences the world over tune in obsessively to watch the minutiae of one man's everyday life, broadcast 24/7, year in and year out. The catch is, the star of the most popular TV program of all time, Truman Burbank, doesn't know he's being watched. Nor does he realize that all his friends and family members are actors, that the events in his life have been script-

Natascha McElhone plays the extra who catches Truman's eye and inspires him to escape his world.



Truman's world contains many hints, some subliminal and some obvious, to persuade him to stay where he is.

ed, or that the island town he has inhabited for thirty years is really situated in a gigantic soundstage. This fantastic experiment in entertainment is orchestrated by one man, Christof, who presides, God-like and invisible, from his director's chair high above Truman's world.

Peter Weir's TRUMAN SHOW is scarcely less ambitious than that of his fictional director. His vision is darkly comic and often downright chilling; sincerely touching yet utterly unsentimental. Weir draws a picture of a world in which fact and fiction have merged into a single reality, taking us from Truman's artificial island, to Christof's control room and into the homes of the show's viewers. It is a dystopia, to be sure, but one which is so seductive that it receives few challenges. Only Truman himself, as the sole "real" actor in his world, can shatter the illusion. And that is precisely what he sets out to do when he begins to suspect that something about his life is not quite right.

The role of Truman is a delicate one that would present a chal-

lenge for even the most accomplished actor, and audiences familiar only with comedian Jim Carrey's outrageous turns as Ace Ventura or the Riddler will likely be surprised by the depth of his performance. But after seeing THE TRUMAN SHOW, it's difficult to imagine anyone else who would be capable of playing the part of the loveable naif who, through an act of purest optimism and existential courage, defies fate and reclaims his life from the control of his director-God. Carrey's wildly expressive features may be subdued, but, along with his impeccable comic timing, they succeed in conveying the subtle shades of Truman's conflicting emotions so convincingly that the character's triumphs and tragedies go straight to viewer's heart. I've been known to shed a tear or two at the movies, but there have been only two films which have made me weep unreservedly at their sheer greatness of feeling (the other, for the record, is A CHRISTMAS CAROL, with Alistair Sim). I defy anyone to sit unmoved through the final climactic scenes of

THE TRUMAN SHOW.

However, Carrey's performance alone does not account for the power of this film; its text resonates with meanings far beyond the relatively straightforward plot. On one level, we are challenged to confront our own relationship with the media and the personalities we "know" via film and television. Like the viewers that tune in to "The Truman Show," we too claim relationships with people, real and fictional, that we have never met. And, like Truman himself, many of these people (Princess Diana comes to mind) are exploited by the media to the point that their real personalities become indistinguishable from the fictional personae which are constructed for them by reporters and the viewing public. THE TRUMAN SHOW confronts the very real ethical problems facing our own society, in which trash TV showcases real human suffering as entertainment, and the actors in soap operas are frequently mistaken for their fictional counterparts. On the Internet, many individuals have

turned the camera on themselves to provide us with non-stop broadcasts of their lives (Jennicam and Sean Patrick Live! are some of the more popular examples). Disconcertingly, these people report that they have devotees who make a habit of going to bed next to the sleeping images on their computer monitors, mirroring precisely the behavior of Truman's viewers in Weir's film. Furthermore, the name "Truman Burbank" reminds us of the two great American industries of politics and entertainment, which, in the world of this film, have formed an unholy alliance to produce "The Truman Show." Part of Weir's personal back-story involved speculation as to the type of government that would allow such a production to exist; it is a question that we might well ask when confronted with the excesses of our own media.

On another, more spiritual level, *THE TRUMAN SHOW* deals with the issue of free will and the human need to take control of one's destiny. Truman's idyllic town of Seahaven is a miniature Eden in which chaos is eliminated through the interventions of a benign but detached God. The serpent comes into this garden in the person of Lauren/Sylvia, a supporting actress who breaks out of her role to share a brief romantic interlude with Truman and is quickly removed by one of Christof's improvised plot twists. For over a decade, Truman is haunted by this encounter, the only genuine human contact he has ever experienced, and seeks solace in reconstructions of Sylvia's image. And it is that image, finally, which gives him the courage to escape the boundaries of his predictable paradise and embrace the joyful chaos of the world beyond Christof's control. It is the Fall of Man viewed in reverse, the story of humanity's extraordinary need to author its own story, of the necessity of risk, and of the will to transcendence. Great themes, indeed, and ones which might have been morally trite, even cloying, in less expert hands. But screenwriter Andrew Niccol avoids any philosophical commentary, and Weir wisely allows the story to speak for itself.

As Weir stated in a recent interview, "We try to protect ourselves from the mystery, but it's all around us, just waiting to reveal itself and terrorize us." *THE TRUMAN SHOW* evokes both the terror and the beauty of that mystery as few films have. This is undoubtedly Weir's finest work to date, and likely one of the finest films of the decade. □

PETER WEIR ON THE SCRIPT

"Although the idea was set in the future, roughly twenty years, I'd say, it was still a reflection of the highly disturbed and confusing times we're living through."



Peter Weir (left) directs Jim Carrey in *THE TRUMAN SHOW*.

by the TV interview he gives and the deference he's shown by the interviewer."

Harris continued, "Would I watch a show like 'The Truman Show'? God, I hope not. I hope I'd have better things to do. I don't think the U. S. government would ever allow something like it to happen. Not because of any moral reason but because of the legal situation. I think we could be close to something like it happening, which is why *THE TRUMAN SHOW* is a science-fiction film: it deals with the far-reaching impact of technology."

Noah Emmerich, who plays Truman's best buddy Marlon, said, "I'm as much a victim as Truman when you think about it. I was put on the show as a child actor—well, not as a child actor so much; rather, I had a pushy stage mom—and I organically developed this friendship with Truman. So even though I was cast as his best friend, I actually did become his best friend. Later, I was told the truth of the situation when I was considered old enough to handle it. So what can I do? Still be his best friend while carrying this enormous burden, or not be his best friend even though I've

come to love the guy? That's why Marlon is so conflicted over his actions, especially in the heartbreaking scene where he's being told by Christof what to say to him just prior to the supposed return from the dead of Truman's father. What I found most intriguing about my role was the whole area of what was real between Marlon and Truman and what was false. I'm not like other people in his life who couldn't care less about him because they are simply being paid to act. Marlon has a sincere and deep love for him while beneath that is this darker underbelly of epic lies. Playing with that was interesting."

Of playing opposite Carrey, Emmerich pointed out, "Jim is always in control no matter what it looks like from his past films. *THE TRUMAN SHOW* demanded a subtler, more finessed type of performance than the big and broad ones he'd accomplished before. It wasn't as if he came in with *ACE VENTURA* ideas and Peter had to say he had it all wrong. No, both were on the same page at the same time with the same tone. What I especially liked about Jim was his willingness to explore every

possibility within a scene. He was very courageous and loved taking risks. Peter certainly channeled him into the direction he wanted him to go, but it wasn't like Jim came in guns blazing *LIAR LIAR* fashion and he had to be tamed. He simply adjusted his performance to the material"

Emmerich sees *THE TRUMAN SHOW* as a fable about the role of the media in our culture. "I wish it were more science fiction actually, as it is far too close to reality for comfort. But it's also a thriller, an escape movie, a love story, a coming of age saga, and a tale of betrayal. It is sophisticated, powerful and visceral in a way mainstream American cinema rarely is and still contains a resonance even after numerous viewings."

The rigors of putting the complicated story on screen in a way that would not confuse the audience was Peter Weir's ultimate challenge in the editing room. He confided, "I did more cuts of this movie than anything I've done before. I had 17 major screenings—not public previews, ones for my editing team. Normally, I'll cut a movie six times. Here my editing crew kept saying, 'You want to cut it again?' I'd often only make subtle changes or scene rearrangements, but I knew how important it was in this instance. I wasn't going to get any thanks for coming close to getting it right. It had to work flawlessly within its own logic or it was over."

He added, "Throughout it all, the basic structure and idea of Andrew Niccol's piece never changed. I just brought my sensibility to the table and supplied the details. We worked closely together at all times, and he stood by me through everything. We developed a terrific rapport, and I like to call *THE TRUMAN SHOW* my take on his work. There was no question I could have been sunk at any time by just one slip. I was only the humble director, trying to keep my head above water, while making this unusually daring and complex mainstream movie that was heading for a summer release. The pressures were enormous, but the rewards for getting it all right have been tremendous." □

INVASION OF MONSTER MOVIE

An overview of American International

By Randy Palmer.

David Del Valle & Steve Biodrowski

It used to be that there were only two kinds of film technicians: those who were self-taught, and those who went to a film school. In actuality there is a third career category, for those who attended AIP-U, the University of American International. Hey, it's nothing to sneeze at. Just check out some of the graduates: Roger Corman, Robert DeNiro, Larry Cohen, Peter Fonda, Martin Scorsese, Oliver Stone, Jack Nicholson, Dennis Hopper, Jonathan Demme, Bruce Dern, not to forget Larry Buchanan. Uh, yeah.

Who would have thought that Dick Miller would rub shoulders with Jack Nicholson? That Ray Milland would direct Frankie Avalon? That 40 years after the fact, *IT CONQUERED THE WORLD* would have gained some actual respect?

That it happened at all must have come as a surprise to AIP's top dogs, the late James H. Nicholson and second-in-command and still-commanding Samuel Z. Arkoff, who now heads up Arkoff International Pictures. In 1953, when they were first considering starting up a motion picture distributorship called American Releasing Corp., thoughts of notoriety, celebrity, million-dollar budgets and million-dollar paychecks could be only pipe dreams. As anyone might have told them (and often did), there could not have been a more inopportune and inappropriate time for a couple of budget-conscious investors to put their heads and wallets together to form a new Hollywood hybrid to produce and release motion pictures.



AIP horror films like *THE RAVEN* (1963) successfully appealed to young audiences by co-starring current stars like Vincent Price with veterans like Peter Lorre and Boris Karloff.

Moviemakers were losing dollars by the millions in the early 1950s. The culprit was a new-fangled invention: families weren't much inclined to spring for movie tickets anymore; they were content to sit home and watch TV, which in 1953 seemed distinctive and innovative. Those that didn't own TV sets still went out, of course; but ticket sales had plummeted, and Hollywood was scrambling like crazy to lure patrons back to theaters. But Arkoff had a vision: to make movies aimed at a particular demographic: the teenager market. After all, teens still wanted to get out of the house on Friday and Saturday night, even if Mom & Dad preferred staying at home chuckling over the inanities of *I LOVE LUCY*.

The legend goes that Nicholson and Arkoff created the

American Releasing Corp. (AIP's forerunner) with a mere \$3,000 in their communal pockets, and that's not far from the truth, though it's a bit more complicated than that. Arkoff moved to California from Chicago after a stint in the military in 1945. "I went to law school in '46 with the idea of getting into the [film] business," Arkoff recalled. "Once I passed the bar exam I went to a different double-feature every day. I started doing part-time legal work from my offices, and I met a young fellow named Alex Gordon, who was really crazy about old actors." A fellow film buff turned producer, Gordon wanted Arkoff to take on a case involving the legal disposition of a film called *OUTLAW MARSHAL*, which was sequestered in a film lab under a strict lien for non-payment of

film processing bills. Following a spate of negotiating and some serious string-pulling Arkoff not only got the film out of the lab; he got it into the hands of United Artists, who agreed to give it a national release.

This solidified a long-lasting friendship between Arkoff and Gordon, who would drop by Arkoff's law office on occasion to talk shop. Gordon knew a fellow named Ed Wood, who knew Bela Lugosi. Gordon and Wood had spent some time fashioning a sci-fi script for Lugosi entitled *THE ATOMIC MONSTER* that they hoped to peddle to a Hollywood producer. "Alex introduced me to Ed Wood," Arkoff recalled. "Ed was kind of a strange guy. He had a number of good ideas, but he never had any money.

The next time I saw Ed I didn't recognize him, because he came in completely dressed as a woman! He was normally sexed; it's just that he was a transvestite. He was quite a womanizer as a matter of fact.

"As for meeting Lugosi," Arkoff continued, "it was so interesting, because to me Lugosi was a hero because of *DRACULA*. Of course by this time things had changed greatly. But even in those days, being Hungarian, he still carried himself with a flourish. He would come into my office and tell me stories of his success on the Hungarian stage." Arkoff would have liked to use Lugosi in a film, but the actor died before it could ever happen.

Wood's and Gordon's Lugosi-tailored script ended up at Realart Pictures, which was run by Jack Broder. It so happened

THE MOGULS

Pictures—Part One.

that Jim Nicholson also worked at Realart, and one of his functions was to come up with new titles for reissues of films made in the 1930s and '40s. Not long after *THE ATOMIC MONSTER* script was delivered to the Realart office, Universal's *MAN MADE MONSTER* was re-released with the title *THE ATOMIC MONSTER*. Alex Gordon was convinced that someone in Broder's office had lifted the title from his script. He wondered if Arkoff could do anything about it. Arkoff explained that movie titles were not protected by copyrights, but he agreed to approach Broder anyway. To his surprise, Broder agreed to fork over a \$500 settlement as compensation. Not that he was admitting culpability by doing so—there may have been no merit to the case, but it would cost too much to go to court. Jim Nicholson, who had never seen Broder write a check for anything he didn't have to, was impressed. Figuring Arkoff must be one helluva lawyer, Jim gave Arkoff his business card and suggested they get together.

That meeting planted the seed that would eventually blossom into American International Pictures. After *THE ATOMIC MONSTER* fiasco, Arkoff, Nicholson, and Alex Gordon (and sometimes Ed Wood) would meet periodically to discuss the possibility of creating a new Hollywood entity devoted to the distribution of low-budget pictures. The trend in Hollywood was toward bigger productions, abandoning the less expensive B-movies that had increased profit margins. While the majors continued to make A films, Arkoff and Nicholson envisioned ARC as a

company that would fill the gap by bringing out second features made with smaller budgets.

Arkoff believes that his partnership with Jim Nicholson came about at just the right time. "Actually, I'm not sure there is ever a 'wrong' time," he suggested. "There are harder times and easier times than others, so let's just say we took advantage of the times." Contemporaries thought them either crazy or incredibly dense for attempting to gear up an independent picture company at a time when even the majors were having problems getting people into theaters; but Arkoff and Nicholson had a plan. Arkoff: "AIP was helped immensely by the growth of the drive-in theaters, because by this time the kids had cars (their parents' if not their own). Drive-ins, however, ended up playing last-run [movies]. They were known as 'passion pits.' They had a very bad reputation in general. But as these drive-ins got built, they didn't care [about playing last-run titles]; they were happy to pay a flat price [to get a film], because the majors were virtually ignoring them. They had no concept how much [the drive-ins] were making because they had no way of knowing. If they'd been smarter they would have figured it out."

The theory of making new B-films (the term stuck, even though it was an anachronism that referred to low-budget studio product) mainly for the drive-in market, was a solid one. "What really started AIP, was that we made four second features, and we knew they were second features," Arkoff recalled. "They didn't cost much."

Arkoff and Nicholson were



not only astute business partners, they also happened to be pretty lucky. For if an unimposing-looking fellow named Roger Corman had not crossed paths with ARC in those early days, there may not have been much of an AIP story to tell. It was Corman who supplied American International with many of their best '50s productions. It was Corman who eventually pushed for larger budgets, color, and 'scope for his series of Edgar Allan Poe adaptations. It was Corman who paved the way down daring new avenues with hopped-up counter-culture flicks like *THE WILD ANGELS* (1966) and *THE TRIP* (1967). And it was Corman who saved the day when AIP splurged on million-dollar mistakes like *DE SADE* (1969) and *WUTHERING HEIGHTS* (1971).

Around the same time that Nicholson and Arkoff were setting up shop, Corman was putting the finishing touches on his first independent film pro-

AIP found success with lurid titles and poster artwork, which was often conceived and test-marketed before a script was even written.

duction, *IT STALKED THE OCEAN FLOOR*. The story made significant use of a single-operator submarine designed by a company called Aerojet General. Corman convinced Aerojet they would get lots of publicity from his movie, if only they would let him use the sub for free. Aerojet agreed. Corman cut as many corners as possible, even hiring an out-of-work actor named Wyatt Ordung to write and direct. Ordung also had a small part in the picture.

Nicholson was interested in arranging the film's distribution under the aegis of the ARC, but Corman was in a hurry to recoup his investment. He didn't have the time to wait for money to come in from regional exhibitors, as Nicholson suggested. Instead, Corman sold his film to Lippert Pictures, who released it under the title *MON-*



Though released by another company 1954's **MONSTER FROM THE OCEAN FLOOR** led producer Roger Corman to his long association with AIP.

STER FROM THE OCEAN FLOOR (1954). Using most of his profit from the Lippert deal, Corman financed his next project **THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS**. Corman offered to let ARC distribute the picture, provided a deal with their subdistributors could be solidified within 30 days. Nicholson spent the next few weeks travelling from state to state on a bus, getting signatures from the regional distributors.

In the very early days the ARC office was being run by Nicholson and Arkoff and Nicholson's wife Sylvia, who was the secretary. The company's in-house writer, Lou Rusoff, was Arkoff's brother-in-law. The rest of the staff included Bart Carre (production supervisor), Joe Moritz (treasurer), Leon Blender (sales manager), and Alex Gordon, who started out writing advertising

copy for the company but soon graduated to producer on such early releases as **DAY THE WORLD ENDED**. "I brought in Alex," Arkoff recalled. "He loved these old-time stars. I was trying to make pictures for teenagers, and Alex wanted to bring in old-timers! Hell, we didn't even have toilet facilities in those days. If we were shooting out on the street, as we were most of the time, the actors would go the nearest gas station or whatever. And here was Alex, bringing in these old-timers who were used to having chauffeurs! But we were very busy, and we needed Alex to handle things. He handled the publicity. He was a sweet guy." (Ultimately, Gordon would sever ties with American International over a dispute involving film profits. The same thing would happen to Herman Cohen. Roger Corman, too, would eventually leave AIP, though in his case the beef was not about money, but directors' rights to final cut.)

"Alex Gordon loved those old-time stars," said Arkoff. "I was trying to make pictures for teenagers, and Alex wanted to bring in old-timers!"

To help hold down operating costs Arkoff took a deferred salary for the first one and a half years of the company's existence, relying on income from his law practice for day-to-day living expenses. Nicholson drew a salary of \$150 per week. It wasn't until some real money started rolling in with their double-feature programs that Arkoff saw his first company paycheck.

Roger Corman finally climbed into the director's chair with ARC's first color release, **FIVE GUNS WEST**, the first of eight features ARC intended to deliver in 1955. Two of the titles were science-fiction: **KING ROBOT** and **DAY THE WORLD ENDED**. The latter, ARC promised, would be filmed in color and 'scope. It wasn't. The film was made in b&w, although it was photographed in a cheap anamorphic process called SuperScope that created a false widescreen image by masking the top and bottom of the film frames.

KING ROBOT was an Alex Gordon project to have starred Bela Lugosi, mostly in footage culled from an unreleased British picture called **OLD MOTHER RILEY MEETS THE VAMPIRE** (1953). Gordon planned to shoot a minimal amount of new footage of the aged actor, but Lugosi was so drained from his ongoing battle with drug addiction that the new footage didn't match the old, and the project had to be scrapped. Taking its place was a little something called **THE BEAST WITH A MILLION EYES**, a title dreamed up by ARC president Jim Nicholson. Nicholson was the best in the business when it came to marquee titles. He had a knack for coming up with colorful combinations of words and phrases that survived as legends long after the films themselves vanished from theaters and memories.

Most of the time Nicholson

came up with titles before a script was written. The ARC poster designs and campaign materials, based on the title, were used to stir interest in the picture. If AIP's subdistributors showed enough interest, the picture was made. This "cart-before-the-horse" method served ARC well in the early years. They financed only those features that accrued substantial attention via advance promotional materials, thus protecting against loss by canceling titles that failed to rouse much interest. In this way Nicholson and Arkoff avoided making motion pictures that had little chance for success.

THE BEAST WITH A MILLION EYES went before the cameras with a budget that had been slashed by over a third. Inexperience and poor luck had caused Corman to run over budget on **FIVE GUNS WEST**, so the next film on the production agenda was forced to take up the slack. **BEAST**'s final budget fell somewhere between \$23,000 and \$27,000 (barely enough money to make a feature film (though **MONSTER FROM THE OCEAN FLOOR** is reported to have cost just \$12,000). It was certainly not enough to hire a union crew. Since Corman was a member of the Directors Guild, he couldn't take screen credit, so he asked his assistant director, Lou Place, to take over. Place was so dissatisfied with the finished film, however, he had his name removed from the credits, and final screen credit was diverted to assistant David Kramarsky.

A

RC was rechristened American International Pictures early in 1956 when a company called American National bit the dust. By this time Arkoff and Nicholson had realized they couldn't make money by making only second features; it was

the main attraction that collected the greater financial rewards. Support features were only entitled to flat rental rates (about \$25 a week at the time), "so we knew we couldn't survive," said Arkoff. "We were getting paid for second features, and you could never make any money, because second features never received a percentage of the box-office. AIP would have been doomed." What AIP needed was to supply ready-made double-bills: a main attraction and a support feature. This would assure the company a profit percentage just like the majors were getting.

But that meant additional advertising costs. "Once we deserted that second-feature slot, we were forced to advertise," admitted Arkoff. "We still weren't getting those big theaters downtown, but we didn't want them anyway. William Fox, in his era, had put up a lot of 5,000 seat theaters. Well, due to television, these theaters were all doing badly. But they still wouldn't play our pictures except as second features. So we would go around and get hold of some last-run drive-ins, and basically [give them] first-run movies. At the time they were charging \$2 or \$3 a car, because they were playing two or three old movies; they didn't care how many people were in the car, because the idea was that they'd make their money on the concession stand."

Although there was a lot of bitching and moaning on the part of the exhibitors who balked at going along with AIP's strategy, Arkoff and Nicholson had an ace in the hole. If theaters didn't agree to book the new double-feature packages, they wouldn't get anything at all from the company. That meant there would be no more second features to support first-run attractions from Paramount, Fox, Warners, and the other majors. In essence, AIP was forcing the hands of the exhibitors; they either agreed to the company's new terms or found someone else to provide product between the majors' A-budget releases.

Supplying double-feature packages meant that AIP had to unearth new film sources. In a pinch they might buy a ready-

made independent feature to back up their own pictures, which is what happened with the Corman-directed apocalyptic opus *DAY THE WORLD ENDED*. The company had neither time nor money to produce their own second feature, so they sold the Lou Rusoff script *THE PHANTOM FROM 10,000 LEAGUES* (another Nicholson title) to the Milner Brothers, another independent outfit who made the film.

"We had all kinds of problems getting that first combination, so we decided to put two of them together and thereby get the total percentage," recalled Arkoff. "In other words, we said to the exhibitor, 'We'll give you two pictures for the same percentage you pay for one picture from the majors. A whole program. That way you won't have to pay extra for a second feature.' They'd say, 'Wait a minute; we'd rather play them as second features.' The major companies gave them all kinds of problems with it. They said, 'If you play AIP's combination we're not going to give you any more pictures.' They sensed that we were no menace to them as a second feature company. A lot of them didn't think we were a menace as a combination, but enough of

them said, 'Don't give [AIP] any play time, or [only] give them part of a week'.

"For about two months we didn't get a single date on *DAY THE WORLD ENDED* and *THE PHANTOM FROM 10,000 LEAGUES*," remembered Arkoff. "Then we finally got the date, but only because of a newspaper strike and the fact it was early December, which in those days was the worst possible playtime. So we rented these two flatbed trucks and put tableaus on them (one for each picture) and ran them through the snowy, sleety, rainy, cold, cold streets of Detroit. But it worked! It worked because, although we didn't have the newspapers, the [local] television stations came out and took pictures of the floats!"

AIP was fortunate in securing the services of talented technicians like Corman and Alex Gordon who were able to wrangle the best out of stressful production environments and miniscule film budgets. Sam Arkoff admitted, "Roger Corman was wonderful for people like us. He was always tight. The only thing about Roger was that, you'd watch the rushes and see that there was nobody in the background of the scenes. And you had to call him up and

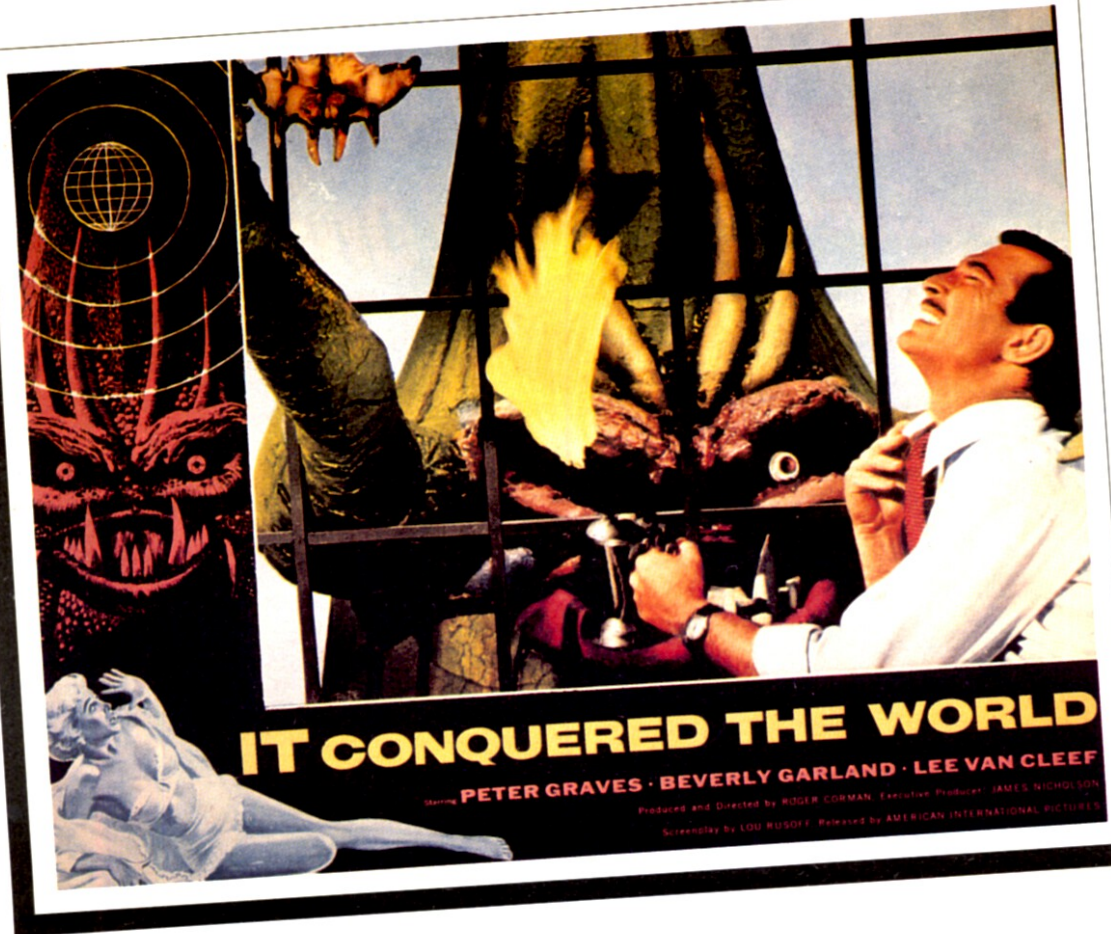
While the title and artwork touted a BEAST WITH A 1,000,000 EYES (left) the beast actually seen in the film had only 999,998 fewer (right).

say, 'For god's sake, Roger, extras are cheap. Put extras in the backgrounds; punch it up!'"

One element that Corman wasn't able to punch up to his cast's satisfaction was the monster in his second science fiction directing effort for AIP, *IT CONQUERED THE WORLD*. Actress Beverly Garland recalled, "We didn't see it, because Roger kept hiding it and saying it wasn't ready. We kept saying, 'But, Roger, we've really got to find out what this thing looks like.' It seems to me that I did not see this monster till [my character] went out there and shot it. However, by that time they had it sitting outside on the grass before they put it in the cave, and I walked up and said, 'You've got to be kidding! This is the monster?' I expected to go, 'My God!'"

Actually, the monster doesn't look so bad in the film, where he mostly lurks in the shadows of Bronson Cave, but Corman was so perturbed by his leading lady's reaction that he had the monster built up to be taller and hence more threaten-





IT CONQUERED THE WORLD: for publicity images, the monster—seen grappling with Lee Van Cleef—was noticeably taller than in the film.

ing—or at least, that’s what he has claimed over the years. The look of the beast on screen clearly does not support this; however, posed publicity stills do reveal that “It” must have been propped up on a stool so that it could more easily reach through a window, so this is likely the source for Corman’s story.

Although AIP produced a variety of motion pictures (adventure, war, western, drama) it was the youth-oriented slant of their fantasy fodder that became their bread and butter. Films like *ATTACK OF THE PUPPET PEOPLE* and *INVASION OF THE SAUCER MEN* were specifically designed with the teenager in mind. There was no guesswork involved as to who was buying most of the theater tickets, so it made perfect sense to play to the youth crowd. For pictures like *THE SHE-CREATURE* and *NIGHT OF THE BLOOD BEAST*, made without any real teenage focus, AIP made certain the ad campaigns were aimed squarely at the youth market. Sometimes

the slightest alteration would suffice, which is how Roger Corman inadvertently got into the teen terror market: AIP took his film *PREHISTORIC WORLD* (starring a very youthful Robert Vaughn) and simply retitled it *TEENAGE CAVE-MAN!*

This move toward teen pics was the result of a bit of research Arkoff did. “I don’t want to take too much credit for it, because we were all responsible,” he admitted, “but I had a 35MM projection operation at home, and because we had a distribution company, I was able to get everybody’s pictures, or at least all the majors’ pictures. I had nephews and nieces who were teenagers (my own kids weren’t that old yet), and they would bring 30 or 40 kids into the house. So I began running our new pictures and getting reactions, and it struck me that here was our audience. The older people were staying home. They were moving out to the boondocks on veterans’ loans; they were raising kids; and they were looking at television. That explains why so many theaters closed down, especially downtown theaters, which were hard to get to and didn’t have parking and so

forth. So I said to Jim, the people who are going out, the ones who have to get out of the house, whose parents are willing to subsidize them to get ’em out of the house, are fundamentally not just the teenagers, but the unmarried 20’s. I said, ‘Look, let’s tag them. Let’s make them for the people coming to the theaters.’ That’s how we got *I WAS A TEENAGE WEREWOLF*, which was a title that Jim Nicholson came up with one night.”

At the time of the publication of Arkoff’s autobiography, *Flying Through Hollywood by the Seat of My Pants*, producer Herman Cohen disputed this version of events in a letter to the *Los Angeles Times*, claiming that he coined the film’s title and signed Michael Landon to play the title role. In response, Arkoff frankly insisted, “Herman Cohen is full of shit. Jim would get them [film titles] at night, and he’d [bring them] in the next morning. When I heard that title, I told Jim, ‘That’s a million-dollar title.’ And it was. Right now, in this period, it doesn’t seem like a strange, daring title. I know when I told it to my wife she said, ‘You wouldn’t dare put that on a picture.’ At that time, it seemed

like too much a gag word for a title. But that’s what made that picture. And of course it became a saying: *I-Was-A-Teenage-this* or *I-Was-A-Teenage-that*. And that’s the way the teenage pictures started. There’d never really been teenage pictures [before]. Sure, there’d been *TOM SAWYER* and *HUCKLEBERRY FINN*, but those did not deal with modern problems. It’s true they were youth pictures in a sense, but they were family pictures in the sense that they really didn’t deal with any of the real, intimate problems that teenagers had in today’s society, which was 1950s’ society.”

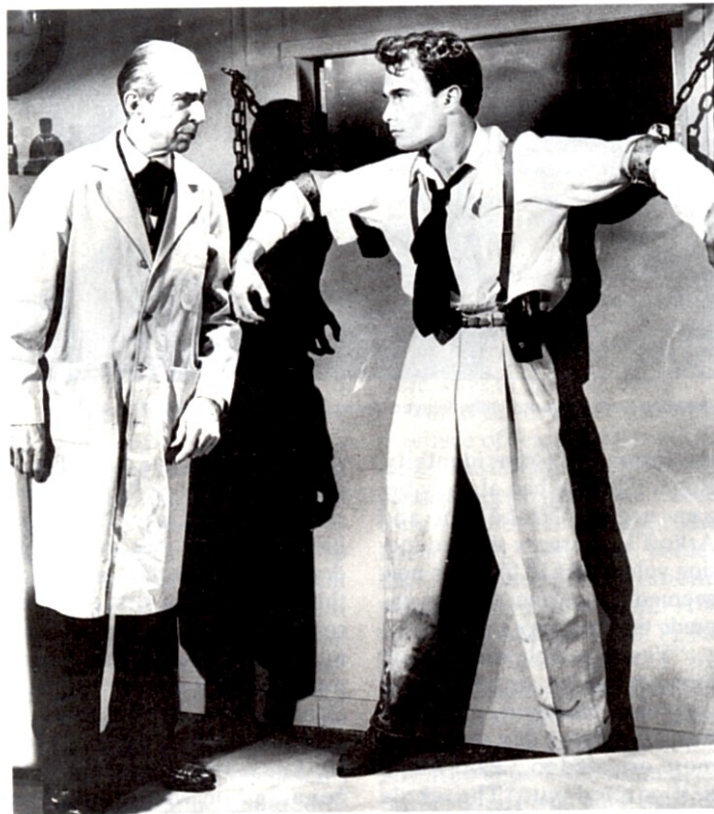
Arkoff’s recollection was that Herman Cohen actually had little to do with the film: “Everything was done through Sunset [an AIP production unit]. Herman didn’t own one share of stock in it. We hired Herman to sit on the picture, and we gave him producer credit. As a group, we decided on Michael Landon. He was not signed up to ‘Herman Cohen Productions.’ Even Herman Cohen was not signed to ‘Herman Cohen Productions!’ He says he talked to Jim a few times, but never talked to me; now, that’s just bullshit, because I designed the contract with Herman. Any problem he had was not with Jim; it was with me, because Herman was always coming in looking for something more for himself. Jim was a terrific guy, and he also knew exhibition, which made him very valuable. We never did a picture that we didn’t agree on together. That was an inviolate rule around AIP. So we were both in on every picture. Herman is the guy who, when Jim came up with the title *I WAS A TEENAGE WEREWOLF*, at first didn’t like it at all. In fact, he sat back and insisted he was not going to put his name on it. It wasn’t until *Time* magazine and other magazines like that began to talk about the picture that Herman was like, ‘Oh, sure!’ Herman made a couple of other films after that with us, but he has not made a picture for anybody in at least the last 30 years. I feel kind of sorry for Herman, but he was such a pain in the ass at all times, wherever he was. But that was Herman.”

(Although Cohen could not be reached for comment, Roger Corman vouched for him that Arkoff's version of events—portraying Cohen as a mere producer-for-hire—did not give him the full credit he deserved for his contribution to the film.)

Michael Landon's appearance in the *TEENAGE WEREWOLF* role made quite an impression if for no other reason than because he took the part seriously. His commitment to characterization helped make the film an early standout for AIP. It wasn't that *I WAS A TEENAGE WEREWOLF* was so much better than *IT CONQUERED THE WORLD* or *DAY THE WORLD ENDED* or any of the others that had come before; it was the title that caused the uproar. More valuable publicity was generated by the wagging fingers of society's moral watchdogs, who accused *I WAS A TEENAGE WEREWOLF* of stoking the fires of juvenile delinquency. AIP came under attack from self-righteous moralists across the country who had seen plenty of the company's advertising but never one of the films! Alex Gordon went on television to defend AIP's product. Those who had their minds set against pictures with titles like *HOW TO MAKE A MONSTER*, *RUNAWAY DAUGHTERS* and *BLOOD OF DRACULA* probably weren't going to be swayed by Gordon, but that didn't matter much to Arkoff and Nicholson, who merely chuckled on their way to the bank.

Despite opposition from residents of the Bible belt and other pockets of moral outrage, *I WAS A TEENAGE WEREWOLF* continued to make money and AIP continued production along similar lines. Opportunities arose at unexpected times and in the unlikely of places. "I can recall a specific instance in 1957 after we came out with *TEENAGE WEREWOLF*," Arkoff said. "We were talking to the head of the Texas Interstate Circuit of Theaters and he indicated he was having a problem at that time with the major companies, who were trying to elevate his rentals. He had a flagship theater in Dallas, and only majors played in that theater. He asked us, 'What do

"Meeting Lugosi was interesting —to me he was a hero due to DRACULA. He would come into my office with a great flourish and tell me stories."



Arkoff met Bela Lugosi while the actor was appearing in Ed Wood films like *BRIDE OF THE MONSTER* (above), but the actor died before AIP could use him.

you have coming up?' We listed a couple of titles, and he said, 'No, I mean do you have anything like *I WAS A TEENAGE WEREWOLF*?' I said, 'We are writing a script right now called *I WAS A TEENAGE FRANKENSTEIN*.' We had *BLOOD OF DRACULA*, I think, too. This was Labor Day of 1957. He said, 'Can you have those ready for me by Thanksgiving?' So between the first Monday in September and Thanksgiving, we wrote, shot principal photography, edited and had them both ready."

All things change, and only occasionally for the better. By 1959 the popularity of AIP's constant stream of thrillers and chillers had begun to dissipate. Inexpensive black-&-white programmers were drawing fewer crowds on weekend nights,

whereas only two years earlier pictures like *THE ASTOUNDING SHE-MONSTER* and *THE BRAIN EATERS* were a solid box-office buzz. The late Paul Blaisdell, who designed and built monster costumes and props for numerous early AIP pictures like *THE SHE-CREATURE*, *INVASION OF THE SAUCER-MEN*, *IT CONQUERED THE WORLD*, *VOODOO WOMAN*, and others, saw the downfall of the '50s monster movie as an inevitable part of the growth process. "There is a term, 'runaway production,' which basically refers to escalating film production costs," Blaisdell explained. "The kind of picture Roger Corman might have been able to make for \$60,000 or \$70,000 in 1955 began to cost upwards of \$100,000 just a couple of years later. I guess I can't

blame Rog for trying to cut his costs any way he could, and that included finding less expensive ways to come up with the real 'stars' of the monster pictures. Of course, it wasn't only Roger Corman; everyone was trying to find cheaper ways of doing things. That's why the folks at AIP began doing coproductions with England, like *CAT GIRL*."

AIP began exploring alternative avenues to meet escalating production costs. Imports could provide much-needed revenue during this period of transition. So could international coproductions. To solidify the company's international production base, AIP sent Herman Cohen to England to arrange a deal with Anglo-Amalgamated Pictures. Out of this arrangement came one of AIP's most notorious coproductions, *HORRORS OF THE BLACK MUSEUM*, starring Batman's favorite valet, Michael Gough. Arthur Crabtree (director of an intense little monster movie called *FIEND WITHOUT A FACE* that had been released by MGM in 1958) was hired to direct, and he did everything he could to accentuate the film's exploitation angles, including adding close-up inserts of gore-encrusted murder weapons like the famous spike-binoculars and ice tongs. It was AIP's first color-CinemaScope release, and Jim Nicholson wanted to play it up big. An American-filmed prologue was added to introduce a technique called "Hypno-Vista," which purported to place the viewer in the movie via hypnotic suggestion. ("You'll feel the icy hands! You'll feel the tightening noose!") Hypno-Vista didn't actually do anything except extend the running time of the picture by a quarter-hour, but Nicholson probably felt he ought to compete with Allied Artists, which was releasing *THE HYPNOTIC EYE*, in a process called "Hypno-Magic" (which also claimed to hypnotize its audience). AIP sent *HORRORS OF THE BLACK MUSEUM* out with another Cohen production, *THE HEADLESS GHOST*, a rather lame comedy-horror. It was the last AIP combination; thereafter it was bigger budgets and Edgar Allan Poe all the way.



Debra Paget watches Vincent Price awaken from a hypnotically delayed death in *TALES OF TERROR* (1963).

The British company Hammer Film Productions, Ltd., had been stealing blood and thunder from American independents with their colorful, full-blooded updates of the classic film fiends ever since *THE CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN* in 1957. Nobody had seen stitches sewn and blood gush in pulse-pounding color before, and Hammer's commitment to period detail, high-caliber British acting, lavish set decoration, and attention to macabre minutiae certainly didn't hurt, either. Suddenly audiences weren't so interested in watching *THE GIANT LEECHES* (1959) nuzzle Yvette Vickers's nubile neck in black-&-white, when they could see Dracula do the same thing in color in a sophisticated slice of filmmaking such as *HORROR OF DRACULA* (1958). Arkoff and Nicholson would eventually join forces with Hammer in the early '70s, but in 1959 they sensed only pressure from their British bloodbrothers. Hammer's productions were fast making inroads into the public consciousness of film fear. With major distribution via Universal, Warner Bros., and Columbia Pictures, Hammer's hot properties were virtually redefining the monster market. It was essential for AIP to remain competitive in this rapidly-changing

environment. Coincidentally, Roger Corman had already begun urging Nicholson and Arkoff to increase the production values of AIP films, so now seemed the perfect time to upgrade the company's product.

"Young people didn't want monster movies anymore; their interests changed, and they wanted movies that they were more oriented to," Paul Blaisdell pointed out. "The whole style changed. And styles do change. They change in the motion picture industry just like they do anywhere else. So you went from something like *DAY THE WORLD ENDED* to something like *THE GHOST OF DRAGSTRIP HOLLOW* [a horror-comedy-hotrod hybrid, and Blaisdell's monster swan song]. It became a comedy, a semi-musical; it started featuring young people more and more. Little by little, the monster movie was phased out."

For AIP, change was both good and bad. Bad, because they were forced to change at a time when they weren't certain they were ready; good, because this change paved the way for future diversification that ultimately led to bigger film profits. How to upgrade she-creatures and puppet people and teenage cavemen? An answer resided in the public domain. Roger Corman hit on the idea of doing a color-widescreen inter-

pretation of Edgar Allan Poe's classic short story, "The Fall of the House of Usher." Legend has it that there was some foot-dragging on Arkoff's part, since this would be the first AIP horror film without a Blaisdellian monster on-hand for visual punch. "Sam is very bright," Corman allowed. "You don't really put anything over on him. He knew that I was slightly conning him when I told him that the house would be the monster, but he also knew it was kind of correct. I mean, psychologically or sub-textually, the house is the monster. So it could be considered a correct statement."

Corman had been in AIP's good graces so long that the company was willing to loosen its purse strings a bit for the kind of project he wanted to make. "I'd been a great admirer of Poe since I was in school, and I'd always wanted to make [a film of] that particular [story]," he recalled. "At that time I was making a series of low-budget pictures, \$100,000 or less, for AIP. Their policy at the time was to release two of these pictures together as a double-bill; two science-fiction pictures, two horror pictures, two gangster films, whatever. I felt we'd been repeating ourselves too much, so I said, 'Instead of doing two black-&-white horror films for \$100,000 each, let me

do one 15-day color film for \$200,000. It eventually became \$250,000. They agreed to that, and that's how *HOUSE OF USHER* was made."

Corman and Jim Nicholson brought Matheson on board to pen the *USHER* script. "Dick was originally signed [to AIP] by Jim," Corman said. "Jim had read several of his works. I had seen pictures he had written and several works as a short-story writer and novelist. I would meet with Dick before doing the script and discuss it, but then when he did the script I would leave him alone. I would get a first draft and discuss it, then a second draft, and so forth." Corman later met with Nicholson to discuss casting for the film. "We discussed a number of actors," Corman said, "and we felt that Vincent Price would be the best. He was our first choice, the first man to whom we sent the script, and he accepted."

"Sam Arkoff and Jim Nicholson seemed dedicated to letting Roger have his head," the late Vincent Price remarked. "Roger had proved himself a really brilliant fledgling filmmaker, and this was his chance to show it. He was very creative, but more concerned with story and effects than actors, although he hired actors who he thought knew what they were doing. Roger had a genius for hiring wonderful people, which is really the secret of all great directors. He was very exciting to work with."

With a budget of \$250,000 at his fingertips and a well-written script, as well as a shooting schedule nearly double that of any previous AIP picture, Corman was able to hire "name-brand" personnel to turn 1960's *HOUSE OF USHER* (the title was shortened to fit on marquees) into one of American International's handsomest productions. The movie's international success led to an onslaught of Poe adaptations directed by Corman. Interestingly, it had never been Corman's intention to launch a series of Poe movies. "My original thought was simply to make *HOUSE OF USHER*," he noted. "But it was never decided to do a series. Each time we said, 'All right, we'll do one more,'

“It was never my thought to do a series,” said Corman of the Poe films. “But each time, we said, ‘Okay, we’ll do one more,’ until it became a series.”

until it became unwittingly a series.” Except for *THE PREMATURE BURIAL*, which began life as an independent production for Pathe Laboratories and was later “absorbed” by AIP, Price appeared in every one of the company’s Corman-directed Poe films.

Everything clicked in that initial Poe film; even the critical responses were respectable. Corman reminisced, “It was truly a wonderful moment. It was exciting. It was one of those rare films where we had both the critical acclaim and the box office success, so we could sit back and see it coming from all directions.” Soon Arkoff, Nicholson, and Corman began plotting a follow-up, *THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM*. There was something of a problem, however, in that Poe’s story featured just one character, one location, and the action took place entirely in suffocating darkness; it really did not lend itself to a cinematic interpretation.

AIP hired Richard Matheson to “re-interpret” the story for the screen. Matheson did more than re-interpret, however; he re-invented. Composing an entirely new story that recalled elements of *USHER*, Matheson simply tacked on a penultimate moment with Poe’s torture de-

vice for the climax. The result definitely wasn’t good Poe, but it was good horror.

Happy with their new arrangement mining the macabre in public domain (and with the era of the Blaisdellian monster and teenage terrors now long past), Nicholson, Arkoff, and Corman pressed onward. Matheson, again on board for a triple Poe-pourri in AIP’s anthology, *TALES OF TERROR* (1962), decided to add some humor to the horror. He combined elements of Poe’s “The Cask of Amontillado” and “The Black Cat” for the second story of the trilogy. Corman recalled, “It was Dick’s idea to make ‘The Black Cat’ segment a full-out comedy. Vincent [Price] was able to bring a great civilized and genteel air of horror with just a touch of humor that we began to play on a little more in each picture.” Corman liked the silliness of Matheson’s script so much he decided to make the next Poe film a full-fledged spoof. “When we did *THE RAVEN* the entire picture was a comedy-horror film. All of the films were sold as horror films, but increasingly comedy crept into them—maybe because we enjoyed it, and it added interest, and also it was a way to vary the series, because towards the end I was begin-



Price is confronted by Italy’s Queen of Horror, Barbara Steele, in a climactic moment from AIP’s second Poe film *THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM* (1961).

ning to feel that we were repeating ourselves. Going to comedy and then going to a full love story on *TOMB OF LIGEIA* were ways to vary the cycle.”

For *TALES OF TERROR* a new face of fear joined the AIP ranks: Basil Rathbone, who was featured opposite Price in the third story of the trilogy, “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar.” Although Rathbone would continue to work for AIP in *THE COMEDY OF TERRORS* (1964, directed by Jacques Tourneur) and *QUEEN OF BLOOD* (1966), the actor was not at his happiest on the AIP film sets. Price opined, “I think [Basil] was very disillusioned, very bitter, because he really had been a great star. People forget that because they think of him as Sherlock Holmes, or they think of him as a villain. But he had been a great Shakespearean actor, a great star in the theatre and in movies. And he suddenly found (as we all did when Jimmy Dean and Marlon Brando and those people came out, and there was a kind of speaking in the vernacular, and all of us spoke with trained accents and trained English, and theatrically we were different in our approach to acting) that if you wanted to stay in the business, you bloody well went into costume pictures. And Basil rather resented that.”

“The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” segment originally contained some extra scenes of Valdemar (Price) in Limbo or Hades. “I don’t remember why, but it didn’t work,” Corman said. “I shot it and put it togeth-

er, and for whatever reason I made the decision to take it out. It was a short sequence, and I was dissatisfied with it, and I don’t even remember why. It may have been that these pictures really were rather low-budget films. We tried to make them look more expensive than they were, but they really were quite low-budget. I think when I looked at that Hades sequence for five minutes, I felt it really didn’t look right”.

TALES OF TERROR proved to be another commercial success for AIP, but it failed to match the profits scored by the earlier Poe films. Arkoff and Nicholson blamed the reduced profit margin on the unproven trilogy format. Thus *THE RAVEN* (1963), despite the brevity of its literary namesake, returned to the single-story format of the earlier Poe entries. And for the first time, series stalwart Vincent Price was joined on screen not only by Peter Lorre but the legendary Boris Karloff as well. There couldn’t have been a more diverse collision of actors and acting styles, Corman pointed out. “That was very interesting to me,” Corman reflected, “because...we had to a certain extent the kind of disciplined English actor who came in knowing the lines and the performance he was going to give, such as Boris; then Peter, who came in ready to create, and is willing to be all over the stage while he does it; and then the middle man, who’d be closer to my method of working, which would be Vincent, who comes in knowing the script, prepared

Price clutches Elizabeth Sheperd in the climax of *TOMB OF LIGEIA* (1965).





The success of 1960's *HOUSE OF USHER* led to an onslaught of Poe film adaptations, reaching a peak with 1964's *MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH*.

“Roger [Corman] was interested in the Freudian implications,” said Price. “His theory was that Poe was to a degree working from his subconscious.”

to do it, but also prepared to be flexible and see what we can do to improvise. And as a result they were great times.”

As the Poe cycle continued to flourish, Corman found himself becoming more and more dissatisfied with the familiarity that gradually permeated the stories. He convinced Jim Nicholson the time was right to try an adaptation of another famous author's work. “Jim and I both liked the work of [H. P.] Lovecraft,” Corman acknowledged. “For me, Poe is a fractionally more interesting and more complex writer, but I think Lovecraft is very good in that field. So we decided to do a Lovecraft film. I don't remember exactly how this happened; somewhere late in the game Jim felt we should combine the Lovecraft story with Poe, but the script had already been written [by Charles Beaumont], and it was Lovecraft. I think I made some gestures toward bringing some Poe into it, so that it could be sold as Poe and Lovecraft, but it really was primarily Lovecraft.” The film was released as *THE HAUNTED PALACE* with Poe's name emblazoned above the title. Only in the opening credits did Lovecraft get his due.

Corman's personal favorite of the Poe pictures is *THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH*, which he had been trying to make since 1961. Once Arkoff and Nicholson had seen the profit figures for *HOUSE OF USHER* they had no hesitation in approving a similar budget for a second Poe adaptation. The only question was which title to do next.

“Sam, Jim and I were having lunch and we decided to do the next one,” Corman recalled. “I had two choices: either *PIT AND THE PENDULUM* or *MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH*. I think it was Jim who chose *PIT AND THE PENDULUM*. After each picture they'd say, ‘What do you think?’ and I'd give them two choices, and the second one was always *MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH*, and we kept staying away from it until late in the cycle.”

In 1964 *MASQUE* was finally given the green light to film in England. Revealed Corman, “The films had been quite successful in England, and they had a co-production deal with Anglo-Amalgamated at the time, who were distributors in England, and Anglo suggested that we go there. *MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH* really was a little bit bigger than what we had been doing and required more money and more time; therefore *MASQUE* became a logical film to do as the first one in England. We had slightly bigger sets, but the bigger sets were partials because we would save the set from picture to picture, so that each time they could grow.”

Corman infused his Poe films with a psychological undercurrent that worked subliminally on the audience's imagination. He elaborated: “These pictures were worked out in great detail. There was a lot of thought as to the themes, the motivations, and the psychology within them. I felt that [Poe's works touched] on the workings of the unconscious

mind, which I think was one of the great developments of the mid-late-19th century. I think in history these thought processes, or movements, develop simultaneously, so Freud could be working on the same subject scientifically as Poe or Beaudelaire might be working on in an artistic way. I think Poe was recognizing the power of the influence of the unconscious.”

A recurring image in Corman's horror films is that of the heroine who makes her way down a dank, low-lit castle corridor. “That again is very symbolic and extremely important,” Corman insisted. “To me the corridor is, simply, a vagina. You must set up two things in the movement down the corridor. It's like a child's approach to sex, in which he knows there is something great and wonderful out there but that child has been told by the parents, ‘That's bad! Don't do that!’ So to recreate that feeling (because I think the sense of horror does have elements of sexuality within it) you go down the corridor, and the audience must identify with the person, saying, ‘Don't take another step! Get out of that corridor! Get out of there right now! Don't open that door!’ At the same time the audience

must be saying, ‘Open the door. We must see what is behind that door.’ If you set that sequence up correctly, it never fails to generate an emotional response.”

Vincent Price agreed that Corman liked to layer his films with subtlety psychological emotions. “Roger was interested in all sorts of Freudian implications,” the actor confirmed. “We discussed those things a lot. Roger's theory was that Poe was, to a great degree, working out of his subconscious mind.”

To augment this perceived quality Corman worked almost exclusively on studio sets. “I felt the unconscious mind could be represented best artificially, that it could be represented best within the confines of the studio, so I made a specific decision to never photograph a natural location,” he revealed. “I was forced to leave the studio occasionally: I several times photographed the ocean, because I think the ocean has very deep, very complex symbolism to man, and one time early in *HOUSE OF USHER* I had to have a shot of Mark Damon riding across the countryside, coming to the house. There'd been a fire in the Hollywood Hills. I raced out and shot this burned out section, put a little

After Roger Corman's departure from the series, AIP continued to make allegedly Poe-inspired films, such as *WAR GODS OF THE DEEP*.



fog through and touched up some of the burned spots, in order to get a bizarre kind of landscape. I held specifically to that theory until *THE TOMB OF LIGEIA* when I simply said, 'I'm going to throw the theory totally out on this film—not because I don't believe in it, but because I've got to find ways to change the films.' One of the first ways to change it was to say, 'I will now go for the first time to natural exteriors.'"

Corman's last Poe feature for American International was *THE TOMB OF LIGEIA* (1965). This time the horror was waylaid by a kind of etheral mysticism that meandered through much of Robert Towne's script. The complexity of the film overwhelmed some viewers, and occasionally even Corman himself! "It became extremely complex at the end," admitted Corman, "but it all made sense. Bob Towne and I discussed every detail, and it all was logical, every single thing, because I took great care that it made sense and fit into the overall plan. I think, however, in retrospect, it probably was a little over complex. As a matter of fact, I remember that I had written into the back of my script a little chart of [character] changes. We had a concept where Rowena [Elizabeth Shepherd] would lose possession of her body and the Lady Ligeia would return to this Earth to take possession; then Rowena could regain possession of her body. So it was a tale of Ligeia coming from the grave to reclaim her previous life and her husband through the current wife. What became very complex was the rapidity and method in which Ligeia would return to take over the body of Rowena. I was in the middle of one scene and I said, 'Wait a minute. Exactly where are we?' I had to stop for a minute, look back through the script, and re-chart what was going on. You almost had to be studying the film, and people don't go to the movies to study a film. You'd almost have to, as I did myself, make a chart of the changes. I guess you can't really give a chart to the audience as they come in!" (Well, maybe if you were William Castle....)



THE TOMB OF LIGEIA marked the end of Corman's association with Edgar Allan Poe, though AIP attempted to discourage the director from turning his back on the series. "They wanted me to do another," Corman confirmed. "I felt when I was doing *LIGEIA* that this would be the last one—although I wasn't certain, because I'd felt that on a couple of the previous ones I was just wearing out on this series. One of the reasons I stopped was that I found that because these theories were working I was repeating them. I felt I should not repeat them, but if I don't repeat them it will not work, because this is the way it works. It's like a mathematician saying, 'I cannot stand any longer saying 2 plus 2 equals 4,' but the problem is 2 plus 2 does equal 4. So it's pretty tough to say 'I'm bored with 2 plus 2 equals 4.' So I just decided after *LIGEIA* was over that I did not want to do any more. AIP wanted to do more, so they simply stopped for a year, feeling that I would change my mind. We talked again a year later, and I really still did not want to do any more. I felt I'd done all I wanted to do or could really do in the genre at that time."

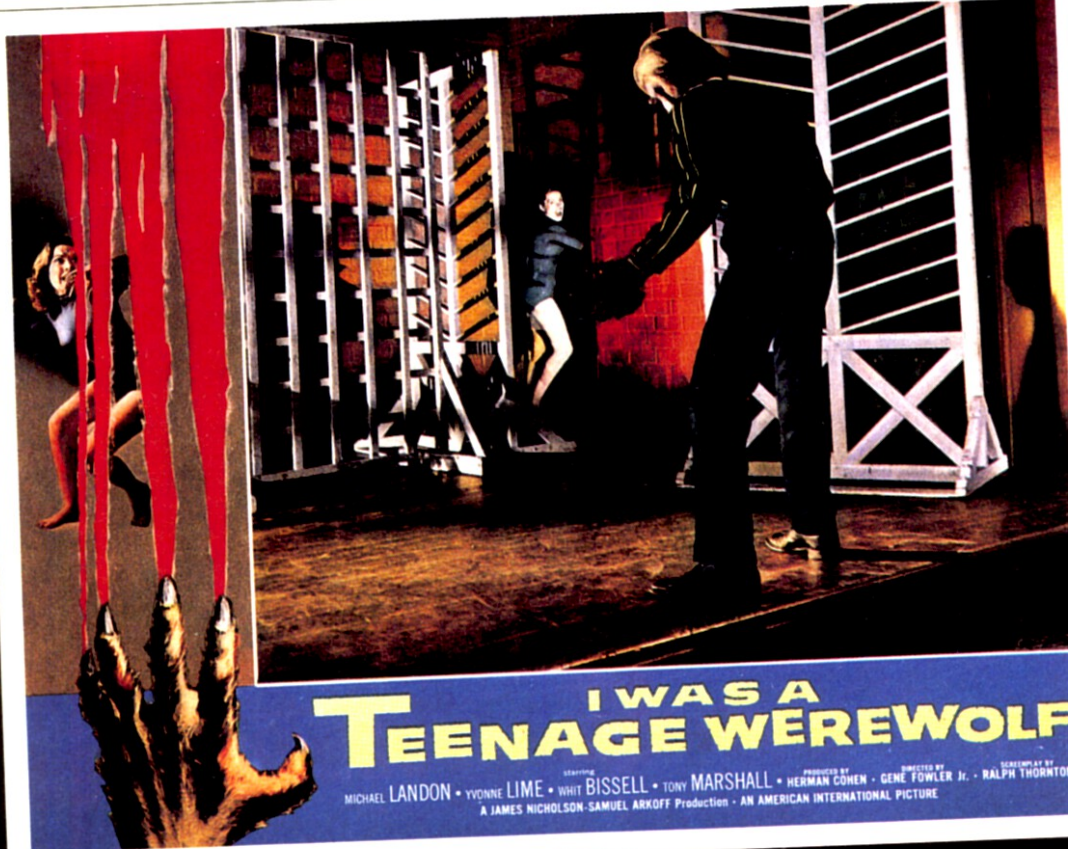
It wasn't only Roger Corman pumping money into the AIP coffers during the 1960s, of course. Sid Pink filmed several successful thrillers: *THE ANGRY RED PLANET* (1959) was a juvenile sci-fi picture filled with cardboard characters and bug-eyed monsters, filmed in a new process called "Cinemagic" (which was supposed to seamlessly combine live action and animation, but had the tendency to make everything look cheap and phony). The semi-sequel, *JOURNEY TO THE 7TH PLANET* (1962), had more dialogue and less monster action, and so wasn't nearly as much fun (although it did feature some interesting Jim Danforth animation in an early monster scene). Lastly, Pink made *REPTILICUS* (1962), a Danish film that attempted to follow in *GODZILLA*'s footsteps but stumbled over its own inertia. Pink was not one of AIP's more formidable talents.

Meanwhile, taking a cue from the success of the imported Italian film, *HERCULES* (1959), AIP imported its own sword-&-sandal epics. *GOLIATH AND THE BARBARIANS* (1961) and *GOLIATH AND THE DRAGON* (1962)

1957's *INVASION OF THE SAUCER MEN* featured the first appearance of big-brained-type aliens on film.

made enormous profits, prompting AIP to release even more foreign product. AIP shook hands with Azteca and Toho and brought a steady diet of Mexican and Japanese fantasy films to the market, including *THE CURSE OF NOSTRADAMUS* (1961), *THE BRAINIAC* (1961), *GODZILLA VS. THE THING* (1964), *FRANKENSTEIN CONQUERS THE WORLD* (1965), *DESTROY ALL MONSTERS* (1968), and *GODZILLA VS. THE SMOG MONSTER* (1971). Foreign titles that were deemed not up to par (*ATTACK OF THE ROBOTS*, *RETURN OF THE GIANT MONSTERS*) were reconditioned for AIP's direct-to-television subsidiary, which was also churning 16mm color remakes of Corman's '50s films (for example, *IT CONQUERED THE WORLD* became *ZONTAR THE THING FROM VENUS*).

Several films by Mario Bava were given widespread theatrical playdates (something that would never happen today). The Italian cinematographer-turned-director did his best to



Michael Landon's tortured James Deanish approach to the title role helped turn *I WAS A TEENAGE WEREWOLF* into a hit film.

scare everyone to death with *BLACK SUNDAY* (1960), which brought femme fatale Barbara Steele to the attention of horror fans in the U.S. (Who will ever forget the spiked Mask of Satan being nailed into the face of Asa the witch?) *BLACK SABBATH* (1964), a trilogy of terror tales introduced by Boris Karloff, benefited from the added muscle of Karloff starring in the third and best tale, "The Wurdulak." And Bava's science-fiction-horror film, *PLANET OF THE VAMPIRES* (1965, retitled *THE DEMON PLANET* for U.S. television) was another import success for AIP. With plot devices that included gothic structures, warning signals, skeletal space jockeys, hallucinations, and twisted endings, it touched down in areas that would be re-explored years later in films like *ALIEN*.

Another sort of import was *QUEEN OF BLOOD* (1966, released to television as *PLANET OF BLOOD*), a patchwork film directed by Curtis Harrington that consisted of American-filmed segments starring Basil Rathbone, John Saxon, and

Dennis Hopper, married to outtakes from a Soviet science-fiction film purchased for peanuts.

"Roger Corman had some rather spectacular Russian footage, and Curtis concocted a screenplay around it—very clever!" said the film's on-set producer, George Edwards, in an interview given shortly before his death. "Roger was and is concerned with stretching the dollar as far as it would go and managed to milk that footage into two or three films. *QUEEN OF BLOOD* was shot in one week for \$65,000, a credit to Curtis and pros like John Saxon who come prepared to work and work hard.

"Dennis was a wild boy in those days, but not off the deep end yet," Edwards added. "I don't recall him being anything but a pro—he had great respect for Curtis, having worked with him on *NIGHT TIDE*. Listen, on a seven-day shoot there isn't time for nonsense, although the crew was very lazy. Some of them smoked pot and could have cared less—this was the '60s after all. I remember arriving one morning to check out the lab set Basil Rathbone was to work on. Later that morning nothing was ready. So I got a bucket of silver paint and started at one end of the room and painted silver up

and down the walls and the floor. The paint was still drying when Basil's scene was filmed. It's called 'seat of your pants producing.'"

The late Florence Marley appeared as a sexy outer space succubus determined to eat her way through the cast in real style, thanks to Harrington's abilities as a filmmaker. "I remember Judy Meredith's hairstyle was wrong for a space film, but there was no time to alter it," said Edwards. "But she really was, as most actresses are, concerned with looking good rather than being accurate

for the scene. But Florence Marley was quite a sight to behold in that film—she looked fabulous with green skin and those contact lenses in her eyes. Florence hadn't worked in a long time and was very nervous, but Curtis worked wonders with her, and she quite literally steals the film."

Other important AIP films of that time included *BURN*, *WITCH*, *BURN* (known as *NIGHT OF THE EAGLE* in its native Britain), *PANIC IN YEAR ZERO* (starring and directed by Ray Milland), *CIRCUS OF HORRORS* with Anton Diffring, *UNEARTHLY STRANGER* with John Neville (of recent *X-FILES* fame), and *X (THE MAN WITH X-RAY EYES)* (1962), a Roger Corman science-fantasy starring Milland. Corman protege Francis Ford Coppola (who lied his way into Corman's good graces by laying claim to high-tech Hollywood know-how) convinced Corman to bankroll Coppola's feature debut, *DEMENTIA 13*, an inspired and stylish derivation of films like *PSYCHO*.

As the '60s progressed, AIP's product became more diversified. A series of musical-comedies began with *BEACH PARTY* (1963). Vincent Price's unexpected cameo in the film proved so popular with cross-over audiences who had seen the Poe films that AIP added cameos to the rest of the Beach pictures for the likes of Peter

I WAS A TEENAGE FRANKENSTEIN capitalized on the successful formula initiated by *TEENAGE WEREWOLF*.



Lorre and (in 1966's *GHOST IN THE INVISIBLE BIKINI*) Boris Karloff. Corman launched another genre with the successful "shockumentary" *THE WILD ANGELS*. Cousin to the biker films were counter-culture pictures: *THE TRIP*, *PSYCH-OUT*, and *BORN WILD*, a particularly interesting and unflinching look at high school violence spawned by racial tensions—all released between 1967-1968.

One of the most successful in the counter-culture cycle was the outlandish *WILD IN THE STREETS* (1968) co-starring newcomer Christopher Jones and Shelley Winters. Penned by Robert Thom, the story chronicles the life of Max Frost (Jones), a rock-n-roll superstar who becomes President of the United States and uses his newfound political powers to imprison everyone over 35 in concentration camps, force-feeding them a steady diet of LSD. This was screwy enough to become one of AIP's highest-grossing pictures (it even scored on AM radio with a Top 40 single, "The Shape of Things to Come," written by Tommy Boyce and Bobby Hart). Thom outlined a sequel, but this was dropped when the success of *BONNIE AND CLYDE* led AIP to do a series of similar films starting with *BLOODY MAMA* (1969).

It wasn't long, however, before Arkoff suggested a return to terror territory. The latest Hammer pictures from Great Britain were racking up impressive ticket sales, and AIP was not to be outdone. Arkoff and Nicholson may not have had their own *Dracula* or *Frankenstein*, but they still had Vincent Price under contract, and so they decided to reactivate their own unofficial series of Edgar Allan Poe pictures.

The post-Corman era of Poe adaptations marked a radical departure for the long-running series. Different directors brought different sensibilities to the films, but not necessarily better ones. AIPoe Mk. II settled rapidly into its own pattern of predictability. Only Michael Reeves' *THE CONQUEROR WORM* managed to stand out from the crowd—and strictly speaking, it was not even part of the series. Overall, the newer

Poe films had less to do with Poe than even Corman's *THE HAUNTED PALACE* or *THE RAVEN*. There was *WAR-GODS OF THE DEEP* (1965), directed by Jacques Tourneur, which was not promoted as a Poe adaptation in the U.S., but was billed as Edgar Allan Poe's *CITY UNDER THE SEA* in England. In fact it's a wonder the picture got made at all. From the outset Vincent Price disliked the script by Charles Bennett, and complained loudly to Sam Arkoff, who felt compelled to order a rewrite. Arkoff sent AIP's Vice-President in Charge of Development, Louis M. "Deke" Heyward, to England to do the rewrite, but nothing seemed to help; Price's opinion of the film didn't waver. "*WAR-GODS OF THE DEEP* was just a disaster," the actor protested. "Nobody knew what it was about! It was badly produced. Jacques [Tourneur] was a marvelous director. When we did *COMEDY OF TERRORS* he was wonderful, but he just couldn't get around the *WAR-GODS* script."

According to Heyward, the situation at this time of transition was just not conducive to good picture-making. "It was a madhouse," Heyward said. "It

was the most marvelously unprofessional grouping of people that ever existed! Jim Nicholson was the powerhouse. Sam Arkoff wasn't quite sure what was happening. Jim was violently over-creative, but not knowing what he could do and what he couldn't do. He'd come in one morning and say, 'I've got an idea,' and throw a title at you [and then want a script]. What we were doing those days was hit-and-run. [Just] do the picture; the people are going to come anyway. It was one of those stupid things where if you excised a scene before you shot it to save a day's shooting, nobody really knew the difference because you didn't have to give the explanation of the logic of an illogical situation. So there'd be a credibility gap and nobody would notice or care, because you would get the same audience, and the figures, if you check them, are normally right."

This kind of reasoning would take a toll on any picture, but *WAR-GODS OF THE DEEP* especially suffered. "Dan [Haller] was our scenic designer, and he always wanted to direct, and he had a wife who wanted to produce," Heyward revealed. "We had a script writ-

The masks and makeup from the two 'I WAS A TEENAGE...' monster movies were later recycled in *HOW TO MAKE A MONSTER* (1958).

ten and sent Haller and his wife over [to England], and then suddenly Vincent didn't want to do the script. They sent me over to do a re-write on it. I came over and found total chaos. Tourneur didn't quite understand what was going on. There was a sort of powerplay on the part of Dan Haller and his wife, with Jacques caught in the middle. I called Arkoff. I said, 'Sam, this is anarchy. Vincent's in the middle and there are power plays going on.' He said, 'Fix it.' I said, 'I can't fix it, I don't have the power.' He said, 'Well, take the power.' I don't know what that means, but I took the power! Dan would make a ruling; I would overrule it. Jacques would make a ruling; I would overrule it, trying to get the picture completed as quickly and expeditiously as possible." (No wonder Vincent Price claimed nobody knew what the film was about.)

Unbelievable as it might seem, things were about to get worse before they got any better. □

**PART TWO WILL RUN
IN A FUTURE ISSUE**





Drakula halála

Fantasztikus-filmregény ~

DRACULA UNEARTHED

Digging up details on the lost 1921 silent film, the first inspired by Stoker's Count.

Which country gets credit for the first screen version of DRACULA? Germany, with the release of NOSFERATU in 1922, has long claimed this honor. However, a filmbook recently found in the Budapest National Library strongly suggests that the Hungarians got there first. It has long been known that a Hungarian film titled DRAKULA, was made in the early '20s by a director named Károly Lajthay. But the film is long lost. Out of the hundreds of Hungarian films made between 1901 and 1930, less than thirty survive in complete form. With this bleak historical backdrop, the search for the film itself has long been considered hopeless.

Jenő Farkas, a Hungarian Dracula scholar, took a different approach. Instead of looking for the film itself, he looked for material generated by the film. In the Hungarian National library, he found a filmbook, published in 1924, titled *The Death of Drakula*. Filmbooks attempted to translate a film onto the printed page to give the story a different form of accessibility to the public. Since these adaptations were frequently fleshed-out versions of the film's script, the story-lines in the books and films were usually similar if not identical. Filmbooks were then (and are now, in their modern incarnation as paperback novels) a popular way for those involved in the production of the film to make additional revenues. With this book, Farkas was able to reconstruct the probable plot of the original film. *The Death of Drakula* filmbook gives us a detailed narrative, which in part answers the question of whether this film was or was not a version of the Stoker novel.

The story begins with Mary Land, an in-

by Lokke Heiss

nocent, sixteen-year old, orphaned seamstress, living by herself in a small mountain village in Austria. She visits a mental hospital once a week to see her adopted father, who has had a nervous breakdown after the death of his wife. On Christmas Eve, Mary receives word that her father's health is failing. Her loyal boyfriend George, a local forest ranger, takes her to the hospital, where Mary meets a once-famous composer who was once her music instructor. He has since gone mad and now claims to be the evil Drakula. (The spelling with 'k' used perhaps to give the name a more local touch.) Mary tries to talk to her former teacher: "Try to remember, Mr. Professor...I was there, second row...you stroked my hair as a sign of approval..."

"I am Drakula, the immortal one," the man responds. "I have been around a thousand years, and I shall live forever...Immortality is mine...Men can die, the world can be destroyed, but I live, I shall live forever!"

Shaken by this encounter, Mary is seized and abducted by two patients who think they are doctors. They tie her up on a table with the intent of operating on her eyes. The plot is broken up by the staff of the hospital, and Mary is untied. She arrives at her father's side just in time for him to die in her arms. Spending the night at the asylum after these horrible events, Mary has a terrible dream. Her music instructor kid-

naps her and takes her away to his castle. Twelve brides gather around and escort her to a black magic marriage ceremony. Mary realizes that she going to be Drakula's new bride. At the last moment, Mary lifts up the crucifix she is carrying around her neck.

"The cross! The cross!" Drakula yells, backing away. The rest of the evil spirits are repulsed. Mary runs out of the castle and into the woods. Half-frozen, she is found by friendly villagers, who call for a doctor. As Mary hovers near death, Drakula comes to her bedside and tries to hypnotize her. He approaches Mary with "a hellish face, blazing eyes, satanic features and hands ready to squeeze." The real doctor has been through a fiendish ride on a dark winding road to get to Mary. Now he arrives, and with his help Mary fights off Drakula's mesmerizing gaze. A lamp overturns, and the house catches on fire. Mary again runs out into the cold night, but now she wakes up to find herself back at the mental hospital. Was this all a dream, she ponders?

Meanwhile the insane inmates are playing games in the hospital garden. "Funnyman," a man wearing a pointed hat and thick glasses, has found a loaded gun. He aims it at Drakula, who seeing a chance to prove his immortality, urges the man with the gun to pull the trigger. "When the shot finally rang out, it penetrated Drakula's heart and killed him instantly. His blood spilled out and left a bright red stain on the freshly fallen snow."

Mary recovers. As her fiancée George comes to pick her up from the hospital, they see Drakula's body being carried out on a stretcher. Papers fall out of the dead man's pocket titled "Diary of My Immortal Life and Adventures." Mary does not want to

THE DEATH OF DRAKULA was the first film ever inspired by Bram Stoker's novel. Released in 1921, the film beat F.W. Murnau's NOSFERATU onto movie screens by several months, poster art (left), courtesy of the Hungarian National Library.

see the diary, and George throws the book away. Mary never tells George of her terrible ordeal. She thinks to herself: was it all a dream, or did it really happen?

An article about THE DEATH OF DRAKULA appeared in a Hungarian trade journal written in 1921. The journal includes two pictures from the film, one of Mary's abduction and the other of the wedding. The details seen in the photographs and in the text match the above storyline precisely. This evidence strongly supports that the book's narrative is identical to the film. The larger issue remains: does this story contain the essence of Bram Stoker's novel? The answer depends on the issue of what is a vampire. Vampires are quintessential seducers, and seductive men and women have been a staple of films from almost the beginning. With this very broad definition, one could find vampires lurking in many if not most films. In an attempt to be more selective, many vampirologists resort to more literal definitions to sort out the vampire from the vamp. Is he or she real or supernatural? For this film in particular, does Drakula have fangs, and does he suck blood? On first consideration, the DEATH OF DRAKULA fails this "bite 'em in the neck" litmus test. The film is not, in effect, a realization of the novel itself; it is more a commentary on the pervasive impact of Stoker's creation. Lajthay evokes the image of Dracula as an evil character already familiar to the public. In only twenty-four years from the novel's publication, Dracula is already familiar enough for Lajthay to use as a symbol of evil repelled by a crucifix.

There is no evidence in the filmbook of any deliberate attempt to associate Dracula with the historical Dracula, Vlad the Impaler. Vlad was part of the Rumanian history, not Hungarian, and his ties to Stoker's fictional character are tenuous at best. However, it is an open question whether this connection was made by some viewers familiar with the legends surrounding Vlad. Of note is that when the filmbook was published in 1925, it was published in Transylvania. Lajthay was also from Transylvania,

The wedding scene in this still conforms to details in the DEATH OF DRAKULA film book, indicating that its story closely mirrors that of the lost film.



“I am Drakula, the immortal one. I have lived 1000 years. Immortality is mine. Men can die; the world can be destroyed, but I shall live forever!”

—THE DEATH OF DRAKULA—



In a dream sequence, Mary imagines herself terrorized by her former music teacher (Paul Askonas), who has gone mad and believes himself to be the immortal Drakula.

which until 1918 was still part of Hungary.

The narrative from DEATH OF DRAKULA models itself not from any historical event, but from the fictional stories circulating in the early part of this century. Svengali-like stories of powerful dynamic men hypnotizing pure innocent girls were one of the staples of popular melodrama. Indeed, since Mary is kidnapped by her former music teacher, one could argue that the story is closer to Gaston Leroux's *Phantom of the Opera*, than to anything Stoker visualized. Still, there is the matter of the fangs. The front cover of the filmbook portrays a wonderful drawing of Dracula, displaying very sharp and deadly teeth. The image could be a display of wishful thinking by the artist. This would make the artwork perhaps the first in a long tradition of posters and advertisements that promise more than is delivered. Or perhaps Dracula did have fangs, but only in the dream. If this is the case, the film itself begs the question of whether Dracula is real. This plot device is lifted directly from THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI, with which this film has more than a passing familiarity. Freud was one of Vienna's most famous citizens, and his influence can be felt throughout the story, chock-a-block full of symbolism and neurotic dreams about substitute fathers.

According to records located by Farkas, the exterior locations of THE DEATH OF DRACULA were shot near Vienna, and the interiors filmed in Corvin studios in Budapest. Paul Askonas was cast in the pivotal role of Dracula. Askonas was in many Aus-

trian films in the '20s, but as these films did not reach wide distribution outside of central Europe, his work is obscure. Those interested can look for his brief but menacing role as a butler in the 1924 German film THE HANDS OF ORLAC.

Newspaper accounts confirm that THE DEATH OF DRAKULA opened in Vienna in February 1921. NOSFERATU premiered thirteen months later, in Berlin in March 1922. On this ground alone, THE DEATH OF DRAKULA is clearly the first film adaptation relating to Stoker's novel. Perhaps the Austrians should also get some bragging rights as to which country produced the first screen Dracula, since the film is clearly an Austro-Hungarian collaboration—it was partly shot in Vienna, and Paul Askonas was Austrian. This "Hungarian Dracula" has more than a little Germanic blood in his veins.

A trade journal reporting on the 1921 opening in Vienna mentions that the lead role was played by a Serbian actress named Lene Myl. The film next resurfaces in Budapest in 1923 with the lead actress named as Margit Lux. Although this might be simply the result of a marketing decision to highlight a different actress, the possibility exists that Lajthay recut or reshot the film to star Margit Lux, making the 1923 film an alternate version.

Lajthay wrote and acted in more than 20 films, and directed at least 12. All the films he directed in the silent era are lost. The Hungarian film industry in the '20s was a victim of the bitter political landscape that existed after the first world war. Infighting and lack of money combined to cripple the chances for talented filmmakers to make movies in their country. Many quit the business or became expatriates. Lajthay went back to his first training with the theater and was away from film for almost twenty years.

Lajthay returned to filmmaking briefly before he died in 1945. He was involved in the production of two sound films. The second, which he co-directed, was YELLOW CASINO, made in 1943. YELLOW CASINO is a comedy-suspense thriller in the Hitchcock tradition. A man has a jealous rage over a woman he loves, and finds himself in an insane asylum. ("Yellow room" is Hungarian for mad-house.) Artists frequently return to themes important to them, and this film, which happily survives, turns out to be a recasting of elements from THE DEATH OF DRAKULA. So although the original film is probably lost forever, Lajthay's vision lives on in a remake of sorts.

Those who insist that their Counts live in coffins and suck blood can rest assured that the German NOSFERATU still qualifies as the first attempt to film Stoker's novel. The rest of us who like life with its complications and ambiguities can point instead to Hungary. It is only fitting for the country of the birthplace of Bela Lugosi to also have made the first filmed Dracula. □

DRACULA UNEARTHED

The Count's seldom-seen Turkish adventure emerges from the vaults.

By David J. Skal

Vlad Tepes, a.k.a. Dracula, was a 15th-century Wallachian tyrant whose ferocious campaigns against invading Turks gave the Ottoman empire a particularly bad case of the shakes. So it's only appropriate that Vlad would eventually make a return visit to Turkey in his post-mortem guise as the world's favorite vampire, to face a final, well-deserved comeuppance.

DRAKULA ISTANBUL'da (i.e., DRACULA IN ISTANBUL), produced by the Turkish Studio And Film in 1952, had long been considered missing in action. It was familiar to American monster fans primarily from a synopsis and photos in *Famous Monsters of Filmland* magazine in the mid-1960s. Recently, however, the film turned up on Turkish television—and promptly became one of the most sought-after videocassettes among western vampire watchers. The cassette has now invaded American shores, and I'm pleased to offer a preliminary appraisal (hampered, obviously, by the absence of subtitles and my nonexistent command of Turkish). While the technical quality of the tape leaves much to be desired, the film itself, directed by Mehmet Muhtar, commands historical interest for being the third feature film to make substantial use of Bram Stoker's story line. However, like *NOSFERATU* and Tod Browning's *DRACULA*, once the action leaves Transylvania, the plot diverges from Stoker considerably.

The film opens with a striking pre-credits closeup of Atif Kaptan as Dracula, staring unnervingly into the lens. As the camera pulls back, we are greeted by the first set of vampire fangs ever seen in a talking film. Kaptan's appearance is a



Atif Kaptan in *DRAKULA ISTANBUL'da* (i.e., *DRACULA IN ISTANBUL*), a 1952 production, never released stateside, that recently turned up on Turkish TV.

fascinating mixture of Draculas past and Draculas yet-to-come: his nearly bald head and sharp features bring to mind Max Shreck's *Nosferatu*; his tuxedo and cape are equal parts Bela Lugosi and John Carradine; and his protuberant fangs anticipate the full-frontal dental appliances favored by Hammer vampires, particularly the oddly buck-toothed variety worn by David Peel in *BRIDES OF DRACULA*.

The credits are superimposed over an obvious but nonetheless charming miniature of Dracula's castle. The opening sequences (set, for no apparent reason, in 1938) follow a Jonathan Harker character (actor Cahit Irgat) on the well-trod

path to Castle Dracula: superstitious innkeepers; a coach driver who looks exactly like Dracula; a mysterious count with a hunchbacked servant (half Renfield, half Fritz from *FRANKENSTEIN*); a single Dracula bride (a la *HORROR OF DRACULA*) who attempts to munch the visitor. Dracula makes his entrances simply by appearing out of nowhere, a device that may have inspired the identical effect in the Mexican films *THE VAMPIRE* and *THE VAMPIRE'S COFFIN*.

Until now, it has always been thought that Christopher Lee (in 1970's *SCARS OF DRACULA*) was the first screen Dracula to be shown crawling down the outer wall of

his castle, like a lizard or bat—one of the novel's most famous and frightening images. Although the tepidly-realized scene in the Turkish film too obviously employs a horizontal "wall" and does nothing with the cape to suggest spreading wings, the simple inclusion of Dracula's egress as per Stoker's stage directions is a moment of certain historical import.

Harker's daylight discovery of Dracula in his earth-box is the true highlight of the film. Not only does he attack the vampire with a shovel, as in the novel; he also manages to plug a noisy round of bullets into the torpid fiend as well. It's an effective update on a crucial scene from Stoker that Francis Coppola managed to completely avoid in *BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA*.

After the Transylvania sequence, the action shifts abruptly to a very up-to-date Istanbul (hardly 1938), where we meet the film's heroine (Annie Ball), a professional dancer who plies her trade in harem pants and high heels in an establishment that exists in a choreographic never-never zone, a fantastic Turkish compromise between a strip show and regional ballet. In the film's campiest scene, the Count claims the house for a solo command performance. Nearly a half century before *Viagra*, Ball's sensuous interpretive dance keeps Dracula's teeth firmly en pointe.

Dracula's final destruction takes place in a graveyard set notable for its unapologetic cheesiness, barely a cut above the cardboard cemetery in *PLAN NINE FROM OUTER SPACE*. It's the only example of a screen vampire being staked, decapitated, and having his mouth filled with garlic that I can recall; however, this

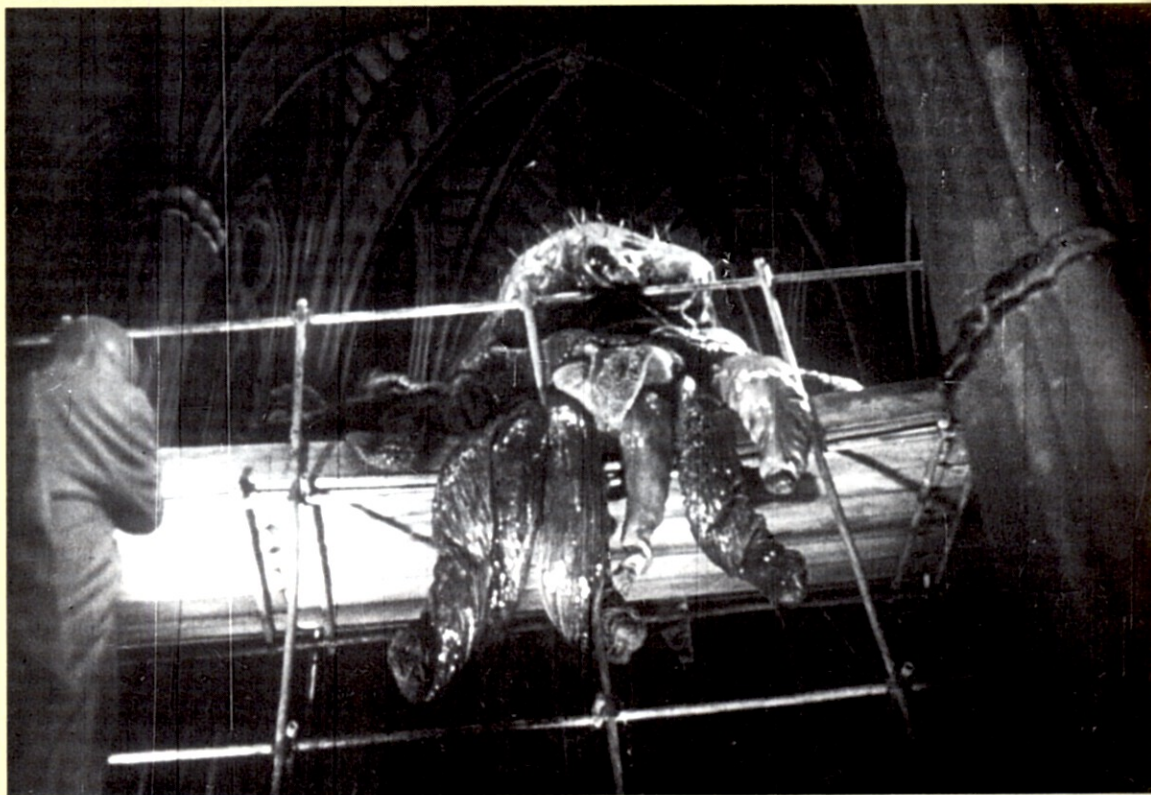
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THE HORROR JAMES BERNARD

From Dracula to Nosferatu, the Hammer fine legacy of malevolent movie music

Back in the days before Hammer meant rap music, a quiet British studio churned out dozens of films that literally revolutionized horror cinema. Immolating the black-and-white theatrical monster movies of Universal, Hammer Films emerged with a flurry of celluloid terrors—notable for their vivid colors, Gothic set design, sexy victims, and sexier villains—that reinvigorated the horror pantheon with new legends of Dracula, Frankenstein, the Mummy. And the best of them embraced full-blooded, dynamic musical scores, creating a sound design that was unmistakably Hammer.

Most of those scores were written by a quiet, unassuming young composer named James Bernard, whose work typified the Hammer sound more than any other composer. Bernard's



Bernard began composing for horror with *THE CREEPING UNKNOWN* (1955, above). His first score in 20 years is featured on a video release of *NOSFERATU* (below).

career began and climaxed with Hammer Films, from their first terrors in the late 1950s through their virtual demise as an active studio two decades later. Another pair of decades have passed, and Bernard is poised to show he still has what it takes to write bloodthirsty good horror music. A new video re-release of the silent film *NOSFERATU* will feature Bernard's first original score in

20 years, enlivening the 1922 film with a massive, Hammeresque score.

While working as a staff composer for BBC radio, Bernard had become reacquainted with former schoolmate John Hollingsworth, who was Hammer's music director. Hollingsworth asked Bernard to compose the music for Hammer's *THE QUATERMASS XPERIMENT* (1955). This

film (released in the U.S. the following year as *THE CREEPING UNKNOWN*) launched Bernard's successful career as a film composer.

The music for *QUATERMASS XPERIMENT* was an impressive debut, written exclusively for strings and percussion. Bernard used a similar arrangement of strings and percussion for *QUATERMASS II* (1956, released in the U.S. the



OF
RD

composer's
lives on.

following year as ENEMY FROM SPACE), as well as X THE UNKNOWN (1957). All three of these early black-and-white science fiction-horror films comprise a stylistic trilogy.

Leaving the area of science fiction and embarking on the first of his Gothic horror scores, Bernard provided a rich orchestral score for 1957's THE CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN. For the first time, Bernard exhibited the type of fully-orchestrated horror music that would become his trademark. The slow, dominant, often descending progression of notes over a rapid flurry of orchestral dissonance, growing and building in volume and register, climaxing in a dynamic frenzy of wild orchestration, gave the film a ripping good soundtrack. Its main theme featured a progression of relentless chords suggesting terrible evil, their first 3 downward notes suggestive of the syllables FRANK-en-stein.

With his next score, James Bernard became irretrievably

BY
RANDALL
LARSON

linked to horror music, and composed what went on to define symphonic horror film music for the next decade: HORROR OF DRACULA (1958). Bernard's music is hugely powerful, dominated by a repeated, three-note brass and percussion motif (one sustained note followed by two repeated notes an octave lower). The score dy-

namically captured the power and dangerous presence of the vampire Dracula. Like the film, James Bernard's score has come to be regarded as a classic of horror, demonstrating the composer's particular affinity for the genre.

As with CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN, Bernard derives his main theme for

HORROR OF DRACULA (1958) introduced one of Bernard's most famous motifs: the three-note phrase suggested by the syllables *Dra-cu-la*.

HORROR OF DRACULA from the three syllables of the word DRAC-u-la. "The name gave it to me just like that," Bernard said in a 1972 interview. "I've often used that way of taking the name of a film to

WHO WILL
BE HIS
BRIDE
TONIGHT
?

HAMMER FILM PRODUCTIONS, LTD. PRESENTS

**HORROR OF
DRACULA**

ALL NEW! in Brilliant *TECHNICOLOR!*

starring
PETER CUSHING • also starring
MICHAEL GOUGH and MELISSA STRIBLING with CHRISTOPHER LEE as DRACULA

Screenplay by
JIMMY SANDSTER • From the novel by
BRAM STOKER • Directed by
TERENCE FISHER • Executive producer
MICHAEL CARRERAS • Associate producer
ANTHONY NELSON-KEYS • Produced by
ANTHONY HINDS



Bernard's music for THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES (1959), with Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing, provided much of the film's power.

suggest a sort of pattern or rhythm. But that was a very simple thing in DRACULA, that dropping of an octave... it seems to have been very effective... It was just a sort of lucky chance that I hit on that, because it's terribly simple. And I suppose that is its strength, really."

Bernard's theme for the heroes is continually assaulted by the vicious Dracula theme, dominated in counterpoint and trampled upon by the pervasive vampire music. Though it remains resolute and steadfast, the Good Theme is constantly overcome by the more powerful Dracula theme until the climax, when Van Helsing vanquishes the trapped vampire and the Good Theme surges with proud self-assurance as Dracula's music humbly slows and fades into low register while the dissolving vampire wisps away into the breeze. This kind of thematic interplay is used carefully and purposefully throughout the score. Bernard utilized the same musical premise when he scored four subsequent Dracula films for Hammer. Bernard's final two Dracula films, TASTE THE BLOOD OF DRACULA (1971) and SCARS OF DRACULA (1972) balanced his dark Dracula theme with gorgeous love themes to hu-

manize the heroes and heroines who struggle against the dominating evil of the vampire.

While Bernard's Dracula scores are basically derived from similar musical themes, Bernard nevertheless approached each picture of the series individually. "I build each score around two or three main themes, and perhaps one or two subsidiary themes," Bernard has explained. "I do not give a theme to every character in the film—it would become much too complicated. Film music is, in my opinion, most effective when it is basically simple, even if it sometimes demands elaborate orchestration. A single melodic line played by a solo instrument... can be immensely telling in a cinema, whereas a lot of clever counterpoint, particularly if mixed

"Film music is most effective when it is basically simple. A single melodic line played by a solo instrument can be immensely telling in a film."

with natural sounds or speech, will be totally ineffective."

With the Frankenstein movies there were no such recurring themes, even though most pictures contained some kind of 3-note motif that was suggestive of the syllables of Frankenstein's name, usually used as the Baron's Theme. In FRANKENSTEIN CREATED WOMAN (1967), the motif reflected the cruel integrity of Baron Frankenstein and the inevitable violence his experiments perpetrate, balanced with a very pretty 6-note melody reflecting the innocence of the woman resurrected by the cruel Baron. FRANKENSTEIN MUST BE DESTROYED (1969) was similarly scored with two opposing themes, one for the Baron and one for the young couple who unwittingly become linked with his evil surgery. FRANKENSTEIN AND THE MONSTER FROM HELL, on the other hand, had no real consistent thematic core, instead deriving mostly from unrelated suspense cues.

Bernard provided a terrific score for THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES (1959),

giving the film much of its dynamic power and helping transform it from a detective mystery into a gripping terror thriller. The score is built around a fast, 5-note progression of stalking low brass, snare drum and strings, suggestive of the vicious dog's loping, inescapable gait. Whereas many horror scores use lethargic, gargantuan horror chords to create a sense of ominous brooding horror, Bernard starts out furiously and maintains that pace throughout the film. The music literally pursues the listener with unswayable fury, all based on a repeated series of 5-notes, rising higher and higher, broken by a dissonance and then starting over again in a frenzy of unavoidable terror.

A far different approach was employed in THESE ARE THE DAMNED (1963), which mixes tuneful jazz with his more traditional symphonic overtones. Bernard uses the jazz rhythms as a texture and a tempo for the film's contemporary setting and its initial protagonists, the youth gang. The composer also uses the jazz along with his symphonic themes to interact with and relate to the characters and events in the film. The second half of the film usurps most of the jazz with symphonic horror music as the film deals less with the youth gang and more with the radioactive children.

THE GORGON (1964) contained one of Bernard's most complex scores, interlacing no less than four distinct themes to symbolize the undertones of what's occurring on screen. Predominant to the score is the Gorgon Theme, a surging, pulsating dissonance for brass, strings and timpani, melting into a subdued motif for female voice and novachord, driven by occasional tim-

Bernard used two opposing themes in 1969's FRANKENSTEIN MUST BE DESTROYED, one for the evil Baron and another for the innocent couple mixed up in

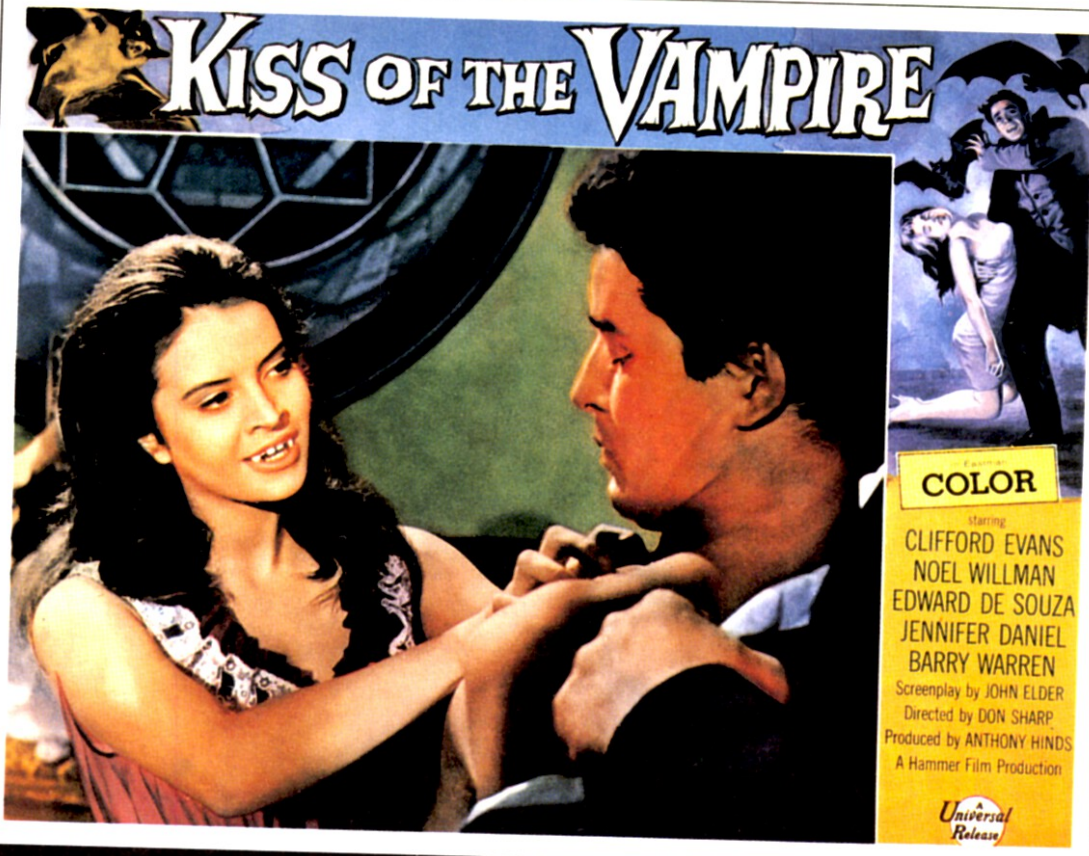


pani pulses. (The use of the no-vachord—a type of electronic keyboard—to enhance the soprano voice producing the call of the Gorgon is one of the few times Bernard has utilized an electronic instrument.)

With *THE GORGON*, rather than simply providing eerie sonic wallpaper or concocting a murky mix of suspenseful music and shock chords to be inserted at random, Bernard invested the score with a sensitivity toward character relations which is remarkable in its subtlety. Phrases of themes play through otherwise non-thematic suspense passages, suggesting various associations and motivations among the characters, and through all of this Bernard creates music which is intrinsically connected to the film. This approach has been his forte, and *THE GORGON* remains one of his best efforts in genre film scoring.

1964 saw a return to vampire territory with *KISS OF THE VAMPIRE*, and a score drawn from the same propulsive style as the composer's *Dracula* music. The exotic fantasy, *SHE* (1965) featured a mingling of African and Arab motifs with some bloody good action music. *PLAGUE OF THE ZOMBIES* (1966) built its score around several minor suspense motifs in a typical Hammer instrumentation, supplemented by native pounding drums which suggest the voodoo origins of the zombies.

Bernard's score for the exotic fantasy *SHE* (1965), with Ursula Andress and John Richardson, featured a mingling of African and Arab musical motifs.



In 1968 came another of Bernard's best non-series scores, for Dennis Wheatley's occult chiller, *THE DEVIL RIDES OUT* (called *THE DEVIL'S BRIDE* in the U.S.). Bernard's score is dark and dismal, devoid of themes except for a single recurring motif which reinforces the hero's struggles against devil worship. Not until very near the end does a theme emerge for the heroes, as they finally begin to thwart the demonic influence of the satanists. Bernard's penchant for

cohesive dissonance is well displayed during the satanists' ceremony, heralded by a slowly thundering, ominously doom-sounding low, low tuba or trombone chords over pounded drums and rapidly dancing xylophone notes and shimmering cymbal. The ceremony itself is scored for frenzied drum and flutes—not since Max Steiner's *KING KONG* "Jungle Ceremony" has there been this much dynamic, orgiastic pagan ritual music. The music builds in force, register and aggression, chords battling against themselves with percussion, brass and strings.

KISS OF THE VAMPIRE (1964) utilized the same propulsive style as *HORROR OF DRACULA*, plus a melodic "Vampire Rhapsody."

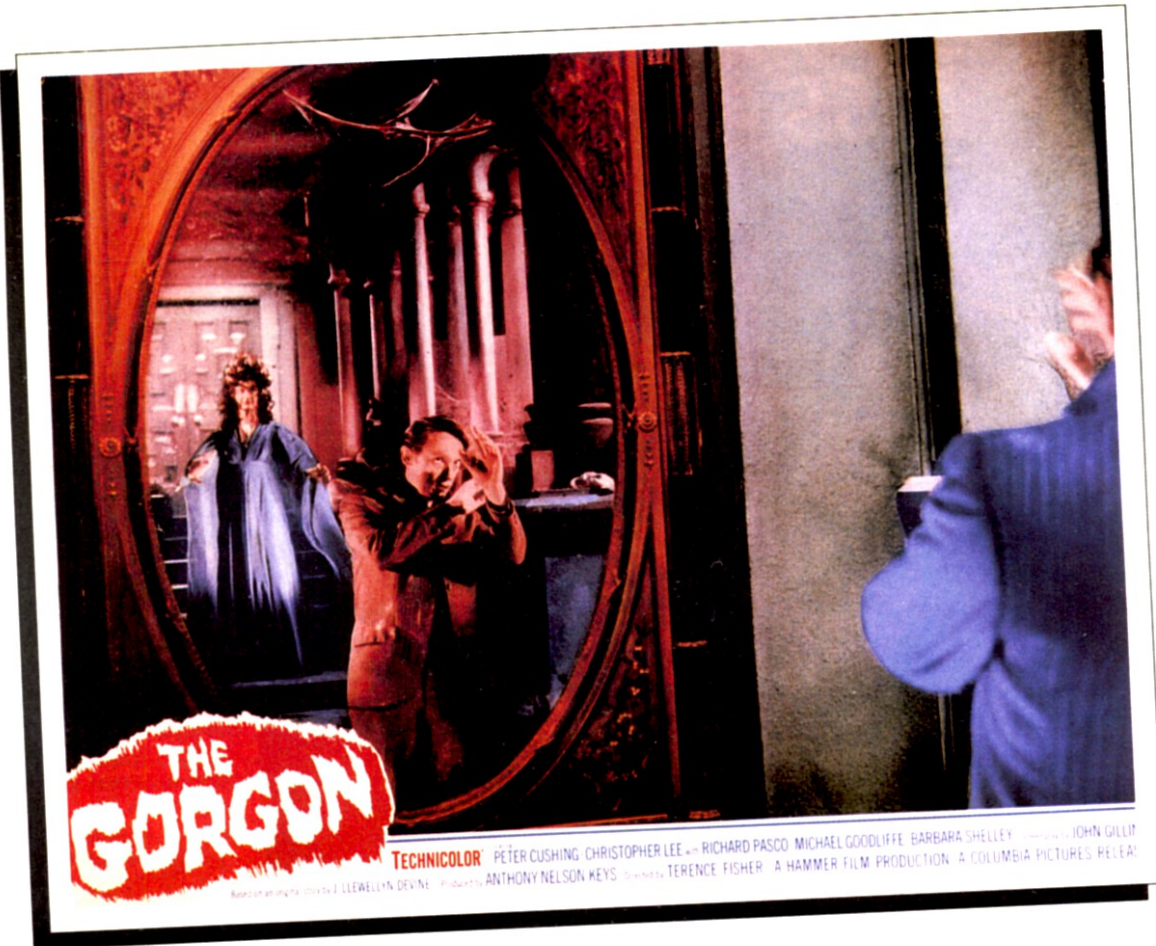
es the *SEVEN GOLDEN VAMPIRES* score with several motifs, providing a brassy, Oriental theme in addition to the more traditional 3-note *DRACULA* ostinato from the Christopher Lee *Dracula* movies.

James Bernard's heavily thematic approach to film scoring serviced Hammer's style well, illuminating not only actions and atmospheres but underlining characterizations and developments. His few scores for the *HAMMER HOUSE OF HORROR* television series were his last work for the studio. He lived in Jamaica with his close friend, screenwriter Paul Dehn, for many years, returning to London in the early 1990s after Dehn's death. Through an associate at Silva Screen Records, which recorded several of Bernard's scores for compact disc release, Bernard was commissioned to compose the music for a video cassette re-release of *NOSFERATU*—his first new film score in more than 20 years.

Bernard was sent a copy of the film on video tape which he transcribed in long hand in or-

Bernard's last feature score for Hammer was a return to his vampiric roots, the Hammer-Shaw Bros. co-production, *THE LEGEND OF THE 7 GOLDEN VAMPIRES* (1973; released in the U.S. in 1979 as *THE 7 BROTHERS MEET DRACULA*). Hammer vetoed Shaw Bros' tendency to score the film with stock music from their music library and insisted upon an original Bernard score, much to the film's benefit. Like his magnum opus, *HORROR OF DRACULA*, Bernard infus-





THE GORGON (1964) contained one of Bernard's most complex scores, including his only use of an electronic keyboard instrument.

der to organize his composition. "I'd never seen the film before, actually, so it was all completely new to me," said Bernard. "The subtitles of the film were in German, which I don't speak so I had to get a German dictionary and try and translate the various bits to myself which had some hilarious results. But I think I got the gist of it!"

Bernard began composing the score on piano in January, 1995, moving on to orchestration in April. It was a luxurious six-month assignment unlike anything he'd experienced at Hammer, where scores were often due within a matter of weeks. In all, he composed just under 90 minutes of music for the film. "The score is fairly melodic," said Bernard. "But I have tried some frightening orchestral effects in places."

Because the film was silent, Bernard was challenged with providing the film's entire auditory atmosphere, with a score that is virtually non stop. "I had to be on top form throughout,"

he said. "Normally in a movie, there's moments of dialog where you can relax the music a bit, but with this I felt that every note was going to be heard, absolutely distinctively, so each one must count."

Unlike some silent movie scores—and rescues—which provide overall musical atmosphere without any specific connection to incidents occurring on screen, Bernard felt precise synchronization of his music to on-screen events was essential. "Rather than having music that just flowed through the film, I thought it would be more effective to have music which absolutely fit the essential moments of the film," he said.

Bernard also decided that the richly Gothic, symphonic flavor of his famous Hammer Dracula scores would be appropriate for NOSFERATU. In the same way that he created the DRAC-u-la theme he created the rhythm of his Count Orlock theme around the syllables of the word nos-fer-a-tu. (The German subtitles retain the character names as they first appeared in this disguised adaptation of *Dracula*, whereas most English-subtitled prints use the more familiar names

from Stoker's novel).

"The rhythm has about three different melodic outlines, according to whether he is being sinister or mesmerizing or whatever," said Bernard. "Ellen, the Mina character, has a full romantic theme, which is scored almost always for strings, whereas I retained the brass mostly for Orlock." A third theme associated with Hutter—Stoker's Jonathan Harker character—starts out very much like a German folk

Bernard's penchant for cohesive dissonance is well displayed in the dark and dismal-sounding score for the satanic ceremony in **THE DEVIL'S BRIDE (1968)**.



song but soon takes on more sinister connotations after the character falls under Orlock's spell. Knock (Renfield) has a quirky, almost whole-tone theme.

"Knock's theme is a sort of mysterious theme where you don't know what's going to grow out of it," said Bernard. The theme is also related to the Nosferatu theme, just as Knock is associated psychically with the malevolent Orlock. Thematic interplay like this carries on the intricate motivic traditions of Bernard's classic Dracula scores.

So how did it feel to be composing for film after a two decade sabbatical? "It seemed like coming home, really," said Bernard. "We all make mistakes in our lives, and I think I probably did make a mistake by going to live in Jamaica, which ended very sadly for me. But then, to suddenly come back to England and do films again has been a wonderful life saver for me."

In addition to scoring NOSFERATU, Bernard is recording the second CD of Hammer film music for England's Silva Screen Records, and he has appeared at Hammer fan gatherings in Hollywood in recent years. He has also met with a number of Hollywood filmmakers, so it's possible his rousing scores may be heard on the big screen once again. □

SOUNDS OF SILENTS

Scoring silent-era horror films: the debate between restoration and reinterpretation.

BY ANGELA STARITA

Within the last year, two new videotape releases of F.W. Murnau's *NOSFERATU* have included new musical accompaniment: one a traditional score by James Bernard, the other a gloom-and-doom series of songs by Goth-rock group Type-O Negative. Both scores fill what would otherwise be an awkward silence from the television speaker, and both no doubt will attract aficionados who might otherwise ignore the film. However, both ignore that this supposedly "silent" film already has a score—in fact, has had one since its debut in 1922.

Music has always been a part of film, even before 'talkies.' The best known directors of the silent-film era made their movies with a score in mind—one that would intensify the images on screen. A host of film makers, from Griffith to Murnau, had music written for their movies, and Chaplin frequently wrote his own. Those scores would then be distributed with the films for orchestras to perform.

Today, however, we frequently see these movies with no accompaniment at all. Efforts to fill the silence have led to debate about the importance of original film scores versus contemporary pieces. In recent years, an increasing number of musicians have written 'soundtracks' for silent films, using modern instruments and styles to counter the unfortunate practice of showing pre-sound films in complete silence. Programs sponsored by the National Gallery of Art, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and the Museum of the Moving Image, among others, have helped spawn a wide range of new music set to such films as *THE PHANTOM OF THE*



Many silent films like *NOSFERATU* (1922) have received new scores in recent years, while historians have been working to restore their original music.

OPERA, *METROPOLIS*, and Buster Keaton's *THE GENERAL*. Composers as diverse as Philip Glass and clarinetist Don Byron have written scores that effectively reinterpret a film.

Certainly, the relationship between film and viewer is radically altered by music. What remains unclear is when, and in what way, such a re-viewing is appropriate. Do new scores jeopardize a film's integrity? Or, as these new compositions proliferate, is a new art being created? Musicians of various idioms and backgrounds are contending with these questions in very different ways. Some are deeply concerned about authentic presentation—film speed, screen ratio, projection, all as filmmakers had envisioned. Others worry that the quest for authenticity is futile, preferring that the films trigger new mu-

sical interpretations. For composer and bassist Mark Dresser, a film's cultural importance plays a role when he composes: "You're dealing with a classic....I felt terribly challenged by the weight of that."

Gillian Anderson, a musicologist, conductor, and radio producer who has been reuniting silent films with their original scores for twenty years, says that "silent film" is "a phrase which was applied retroactively—a completely inaccurate expression." (Instead, she has coined the term "sound-off film.") Early directors saw the emotional impact of their films as inextricably tied to music and chose composers to score their work with care. Sometimes the scores were not original music, but compiled scores, usually pop songs of the day along with opera—"fantastically chosen" material, according to Ander-

son. She believes that seeing a silent film without this musical accompaniment is to miss the intent of the film maker. To that end, Anderson (who is no relation to the *X-FILES* star—though she does occasionally receive the actress's fan mail) conducts orchestras which perform these original scores in synch with the visual images.

In 1997, Anderson founded *Cinemusica Viva*, a group based in Bologna which performs the scores Anderson has restored. Through *Cinemusica*, Anderson hopes to bring original scores to a growing audience. To date, she has restored 22 scores with orchestras such as the National Symphony, the Brandenburg Philharmonic, the Puerto Rican Symphony, the RAI orchestra (Rome), the orchestra of Radio Deutschland, and many others throughout the United States and Europe.

The restoration work is not an exclusively musical endeavor. To get a sense of a score, Anderson reads directors' accounts, film histories, and reviews written by critics of the age. She works closely with film historians, to synchronize the music with the film's images shown at the correct speed—the speed at which the film was shot. When piecing together the music for *NOSFERATU*, she took clues from books on film music and newspaper accounts, doing a scene-by-scene analysis to recover the score. "It's really like doing a three-dimensional crossword puzzle," she said.

Anderson often finds herself alone in her struggle for authenticity. In 1995, she performed the score of *NOSFERATU* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. While rehearsing with a 10-piece orchestra made up of students from the Manhattan School of Music, she

SOUNDS OF SILENTS

PHANTOM OF THE ORPHEUM

Keeping the tradition of organ accompaniment alive.

Only the most lavish silent films received the luxury of a full orchestral score, and even that occurred only in the preeminent movie palaces that could accommodate a live performance. When films reached smaller venues, they had to rely on the skill of a house pianist or organist for their musical accompaniment. For whatever reason (perhaps because on-screen characters like the Phantom of the Opera seemed to prefer the instrument) organ music became associated with the horror genre, even though the organ is capable of a wide range of accompaniment.

This association continues to this day. Even though many silent films are now available in prints that have had musical soundtracks appended to them, film preservation societies often sponsor special events, screening silent movies in old movie houses—with live organ accompaniment. One fine example of this is the annual Spook-a-Thon put on by the Friends of the Orpheum Theatre in downtown Los Angeles. Each year, on two weekend nights prior to Halloween, the elegant Orpheum presents a series of films such as *THE ABOMINABLE DR. PHIBES*, *CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON*, and *PSYCHO*. Included each year is at least one silent film, such as *DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE* (1920) with John Barrymore, or Todd Browning's *THE UNKNOWN* (1925) with Lon Chaney.

The man responsible for bringing audio life to these silent works is Robert York, who works very much in the improvisational mode of his counterparts of yesteryear. In the silent era, sometimes house organists were provided with a score, but just as often they improvised to fit the on-screen events. So far, York has been forced to take the latter approach, because scores have not been provided with the prints screened at the Orpheum. "Actually, I'm glad, because for me it's a thousand times easier to just make it up," he said. "I'm a jazz musician, so I'm used to improvising. If I had to read a score, first of all, it's hard to see down there. And if you've got to stick to the score it would make me crazy because your tempo has to be right to time it to the screen. It's kind of a tough thing, so I would prefer not to have a score, al-



In the tradition of the silent era, the Orpheum Theatre's Robert York provides live organ music for films like the 1920 *DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE*, with John Barrymore (above).

though it would be fun to try it sometime."

Instead, York simply makes some mental notes the night beforehand. "Every year, I get there a couple nights before the performance, after they show their last movie," he explained. "Then I work until 12:00 or 1:00 in the morning. The projectionist will show one reel at a time, which is usually about 20 minutes or so. While they're changing reels, I think about it and improvise some things and just sort of make a mental note of it."

York mostly avoids incorporating recognized music in his accompaniments, although his performance for *JEKYLL AND HYDE* did include excerpts from Puccini. "That always works—Puccini and the old operas," he explained, adding, "It's so natural; it's so obvious. Wagner would work very well too, but I don't know a lot of Wagner, so I had to use what I knew. Then you can also play with those themes—just take the germ of one of those famous melodies and play around with it."

JEKYLL AND HYDE was York's first attempt at film accompaniment. "That was scary," he admitted. "That was such a high. I was not ready for the response I got. The audience was really wonderful. I have to learn to not be so modest and really get up there and take a bow. I was thankful they didn't boo me!"

The audiences for these performances come

to have a rollicking good time—many of them in costume—so camp would be a tempting approach. York's music avoids this, however. "I tried to play it straight because that is what they wanted, and I felt that it was right. I try to elevate my stuff so that it has a little more dignity than the '40s radio soap operas, with all the diminished chords and stuff. That was a different style altogether, with the Hammond organ electric sound. I try to think in terms of an orchestra, because that's really what it is. Originally, it was called the Robert Hope Jones Orchestra. What it was about was 'How can we get an orchestra into little tiny theatres that don't have the room, and how can we cut down on the costs of having 32 union musicians?'"

The Orpheum's organ admirably fulfills this goal. Like all pipe organs, it is a unique instrument actually built into the structure of the building; in effect, the theatre itself, because of the way it resonates certain notes or enhances certain frequencies, becomes an extension of the instrument. The organ, which was built in 1926 along with the theatre, produces sound in the old-fashioned, pre-digital-technology fashion—with air driven through pipes. Also typical for house organs, it's enhanced with an assortment of bells and whistles. (In fact, the organ is the literal source of the phrase "bells and whistles," which has come to be a figure of speech signifying flashy added features.) "It's like having a real brass band and a real woodwind band up there, with pipes imitating violins and sound effects like car horns and bird whistles," York explained. "There are three keyboards; each one is set up for something different, and you jump around from keyboard to keyboard. The pedals give you all the base notes, the low tones; some of those pipes are sixteen feet tall. That would be your string bass or bass brass, as well as bass drum, kettle drum, timpani roll, crash cymbal. The lower keyboard is called Accompaniment; it's in the middle register. It also has 'second touch'—usually with that you have tubas or smooth brass or something like that—so that when you push the key down harder, another sound comes on top of what you already have set up, so you can do two things with one hand

on that keyboard. There's a harp, some percussion, a light tinkly bell, and a thing called 'vox humana,' which is supposed to sound like a human voice but sounds more like a wind or whispering. So I will combine that with strings, and that will give the the Danny Elfman underscoring kind of sound or the Steven Spielbergish magical thing."

York continued, "The second keyboard is called the Great Keyboard because it has from the lowest register to the very highest. Then the top keyboard is called the Solo. That has things like tuba and clarinet, usually in the middle range. There's a thing called the tibia, which is of course named after the bone; it's a very hollow sounding flute, with vibrato. That might be on reserve on the top keyboard. Then the middle keyboard could be all the big stuff, and the lower keyboard would be the whispering strings, so I can go back and forth between each thing. I usually use the lowest keyboard to do the preponderance of the underscoring, because most of it should be very plain and out of the way, not noticeable. But then when something builds on the screen, I'll move to the next keyboard and build it up. So it's like having three completely different sounds. It's like what they do now in bands that have these electronic samplers by Yamaha and Korg: they'll have a stack of different keyboards and jump from sound to sound to sound—like that's something new!"

As with *JEKYLL AND HYDE*, York kept his performance of *THE UNKNOWN* "fairly serious. I didn't use any classical music with that one at all; I made up some things. A lot of times, with something scary like that, to get the scary effect, I'll use a lot of reeds on the pedals, real low, and do a lot of what we call tritones or a diminished fifths, and then add something up high."

Although he prefers improvisation to restoration, York appreciates the work done in this field by others: "I'm glad somebody is into the research of it, because I'm not. I feel this work is very important; I really believe in that. It's just that I just don't have the time—to be a full-time musician, you've got to dedicate yourself."

York will be back at the keyboard for this Halloween's Spook-A-Thon, tackling a subject that has received numerous treatments in just the last two years. Along with *ROSEMARY'S BABY* and the Spanish-language version of Universal's 1931 *DRACULA*, the Orpheum will screen *NOSFERATU*.
Steve Biodrowski

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

"You're dealing with a classic...I felt terribly challenged by that," said Dresser. "When I played it at a slow speed, everything made much more sense, including the music."



Getting the right projection speed was a typical problem faced by Mark Dresser while performing his score for *THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI* (1919)

was frustrated to find the film was running too quickly—not enough to make much of a difference visually but an important difference musically. When the projectionist, unaware of her annoyance, came out of his booth to introduce himself, the two had a cordial exchange until Anderson asked him about the film speed he had chosen. The answer—20 frames per second—was what she had suspected but not what she wanted to hear. "It needs to be 18 frames a second," she snapped. Before making a quick exit, he told her he was using the same speed he used at her last performance at the Museum, when she had conducted the score for Charlie Chaplin's *THE CIRCUS*. The two films, she told him, have

different speeds, a bit of information which failed to impress him. Later, she said, "I shouldn't be surprised. Fifteen or twenty years ago when this interest in Early Music started, you couldn't find a harpsichord. It's the same thing."

Anderson's 'harpsichords' are the timing belts that let common projectors show silent films at their appropriate speed. The belts cost \$3,000 apiece, so Anderson is frequently hard pressed to find venues for performing the scores she re-orchestrates for modern musicians. Although there is no room for an orchestra in the Museum of Modern Art's theater, Anderson praises the museum for its "very enlightened policy" of collecting music with films. That collec-

tion has been given to the Library of Congress, put on microfilm and available to the public. In April, she will be performing in New York to help the Kaye Playhouse raise money to purchase variable speed projectors.

Although Anderson was not pleased with the performance of *NOSFERATU*, the audience could certainly get a good idea of the film's original music, particularly when compared to a performance given by Liminal, a musical group which presented its new score for the film as part of the Silent Films/Loud Music series sponsored by a New York club, the Knitting Factory. Murnau's film was an unauthorized adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which follows Jonathan Harker (or Hutter, depending on the subtitles), who sets off from Bremen for the Carpathian Mountains to arrange the purchase of a home for Count Orlok (Max Schreck). Eventually, the vampire count follows Harker back to Bremen and wreaks havoc on the ordered suburban life Harker had left behind. In the original score, ominous chords accompany the opening titles, interspersed with lighter segments replete with piano trills and flute to underscore the pastoral sweetness of the Harkers' life in Bremen. The original music spells danger when Harker arrives at an inn on the way to the Count's manor, but he wakes the next morning, the music has again softened as he shakes off any doubts he had had the night before. When a coach refuses to take Harker further into the Carpathians for fear of the Count, he gets out and watches it speed down the mountain, away from danger. At this point, the coach moves at a surreal pace, and in Liminal's version a cartoonish musical interlude makes the high speed retreat comical. The original score plays sinister and slow, emphasizing the gravity of the scene. A few scenes later, when the Count's casket collection is mysteriously loaded onto a wagon at top speed, the original score remains foreboding and slowly



Gary Lucas and Walter Horn, with their new score for *THE GOLEM: HOW HE CAME INTO THE WORLD*, reinterpreted the film for contemporary viewers.

paced, while Liminal adds another high-speed comic inflection. Overall, the original score is not simply a collage of repeated themes but a coherent piece, forming what Anderson calls "a totality that draws you back into another era in a very instantaneous way."

What Liminal's version had in common with the original was a juxtaposition of the suburban bliss of the Harkers and its underbelly, the world inhabited by Orlok. Liminal's music heightened the most horrific parts of the film with insistent, blaring chords, while domestic scenes became funny with a warped sitcom theme. The performance depended upon extremes. Its schizophrenic sensibility provided a completely different experience of the movie than the original score.

Anderson adamantly believes that to create appropriate music for films, musicians must understand the context and history of their subjects. While she appreciates the work of groups such as San Francisco's Club Foot Orchestra, which performs original compositions for silent classics, she fears that all too frequently musicians do not have particular interest in sound-off film or the concerns of its creators.

Finding the balance that keeps musical accompaniment from overpowering the images on screen is an issue that the Club Foot Orchestra's musical director, Richard Marriott, says is an extremely difficult one to resolve. The group began performing music for films in 1987, with Marriott's score for

THE CABINET OF DOCTOR CALIGARI. He again wrote the score Club Foot performed for *NOSFERATU*, but by 1991 other orchestra members began to compose.

Before choosing a film, the group considers the original music (or in some cases a score that has been attached to it years after it was made), and how well it suits the screen images. They had once thought of scoring *UN CHIEN ANDALOU*, but on hearing the music compiled for the 1960 release of the film—from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, along with Argentinian tangos from the 1920s—they decided that they couldn't improve on a composition so conceptually well-suited to the film. The American version of *THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI* (1919) was distributed with a score that Marriott says had aged far more quickly than the film itself, so Club Foot jumped into the breach. But in trying to create music that does a better job underscoring the film's narrative, the group tries to maintain the instrumentation of the time and tries "not to violate the mood of the screen." Often, Marriott says, when a part of their score seems to overpower the movie, he finds that orchestration is "the culprit" and an adjustment of the arrangement frequently solves the problem.

Another factor when choosing a film is the availability of good prints—Club Foot makes a point of finding a print before beginning to compose. Mark Dresser, a New York-area con-

NEW WINE IN OLD BOTTLES

"The music causes the audience to read the film in a perverse way," said Anderson of adding new music to old films. "The two are not supposed to war with each other."

trabassist who has also written a score for *DR. CALIGARI*, carries his own prints and backup copies on video when he tours. After a disastrous mishap on his first tour as a group leader, Dresser is careful to investigate whether a projectionist knows how to handle the film properly. If not, he will perform the score without the images rather than risk losing his print.

Dresser wrote his *CALIGARI* score in synch with a video showing the film at 24 frames per second. The speed and the abrupt editing of the film's ending left Dresser confused. After watching the film repeatedly and studying its political content, he could make more sense of it. He learned the film was written by Carl Mayer and Hans Janowitz as a commentary on the German public's relationship with its authoritarian government. The film depicts a somnambulist who unfailingly follows the orders of his master, Dr. Caligari. To blunt the political content, the film's producer, Erich Pommer, and by some accounts, its director, Robert Wiene, decided to create a

framing device making the story merely the delusion of the mad narrator.

A year into performing his score, Dresser learned from *Village Voice* film critic J. Hoberman that the movie had been made at 18 frames per second. "When I finally played it at a slow speed," Dresser said, "the film was a revelation....everything made much more sense, including the music. It all transformed in a much more organic way: the ending wasn't as abrupt; all of a sudden you could really intertwine the transitions with the film. It became a much more joyful experience."

Many of the performers playing scores for silent films have found a way to meld two traditions—that of written scores which had been intended for a full orchestra and that of the improvised scores played in theaters which had only a small group or single musician. Dresser and his trio, Dave Douglas on trumpet and Denman Mulrone playing prepared piano, perform the score to *CALIGARI* but as a frame within which the three may improvise, particularly

Lucas believes his new approach to *THE GOLEM* is valid, and attempts at authenticity are futile, because "you can't travel in a time machine."



during transitional moments. Because Dresser sees film as “a fixed form,” a structure was needed to “direct the improvisation,” but the improvised segments were a powerful means of moving the plot forward while adding a depth to the screen images that a composed score might have left unexplored. The three continually made new discoveries while performing, a fact which prompts Dresser to call the project a success—he never grew tired of the score.

For the written music, Dresser wanted to capture what he calls “the character of the film...[its] early 20th century color.” But ultimately he doesn’t feel that a musician must strive for authenticity. What is important, he argues, is the quality of the music. Likewise, when Samm (c.q.) Bennett, a percussionist living in Japan, chose to score a series of 1920s cartoons featuring Koko the Clown, he had no interest in writing a soundtrack in any way reminiscent of that era. Instead, he used a sampler to create music which heightens the anarchic quality of the cartoon character, who constantly tries to escape the boundaries of the drawing board. Bennett argues that an antiquated sound would not have revealed the contemporary attributes of the animation: “I’ve tried to make it sonically very modern. The quality of the art is just excellent, and it’s so clever. It almost could have been made yesterday. The ideas are not corny; they’re very smart. It definitely deserves more than your basic ragtime piano.”

Gary Lucas, a guitarist best known for his work with the rock innovator, Captain Beefheart, decided to give a contemporary flavor to Paul Wegener’s *DER GOLEM*, a 1920 film that details the story of Jehudah Low, a 16th-century rabbi of Prague who creates a clay superman to protect the Jewish community from a pogrom. Lucas confides that his love of horror films, silent or not, is an extension of a childhood obsession and goes on to describe a chance meeting with Peter Cushing. Lucas, who can’t speak for long with-

out throwing in an allusion to movies or TV, named his two bands Gods and Monsters and The Killer Shrews.

When Lucas was asked to score a silent film for the Brooklyn Academy of Music’s Next Wave series, he thought of Paul Wegener and Carl Boese’s *DER GOLEM: WIE ER IN DIE WELT KAM (THE GOLEM: HOW HE CAME INTO THE WORLD)*, a film he had never seen but had read about on many occasions. At a private screening at the Museum of Modern Art, he was immediately struck by the film. He then called on his childhood friend Walter Horn to co-write the piece—an appropriate choice, considering their mutual love of science fiction and horror. (In their first year at Yale they started an opera of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, completing only the first act.)

When performing the score live with the Golem’s imposing figure above him, Lucas cuts an intense, maniacal figure, more akin to Dr. Frankenstein than his hapless creation. His score is an apocalyptic convergence of noise-core and folk, with a moving melody line just under the raging surface. When the performance is done and

the room still, Lucas exudes an almost angelic sweetness, a boy who has done good and knows it. In conversation, the drive of his music seems more apparent—he is surprisingly strong-willed. His fascination with the Golem seems natural given the mercurial nature they both seem to share.

DER GOLEM’s star, co-writer and co-director Paul Wegener had a particular fascination for the story; he had filmed two previous versions: *DER GOLEM (1914)* and *DER GOLEM UN DIE TANZERIN (THE GOLEM AND THE DANCER, 1917)*. The 1920 film, the last of the trilogy, is frequently viewed as a prequel to the 1914 *DER GOLEM*, which was set in modern day Germany. All three movies portray the Golem in love, which suggests that Wegener had in mind Rudolf Lothar’s “Der Golem,” a short story which hints at the monster’s sexuality. Wegener, as the Golem, powerfully evokes the monster’s yearnings to be human and his self-disgust at the loathing he provokes.

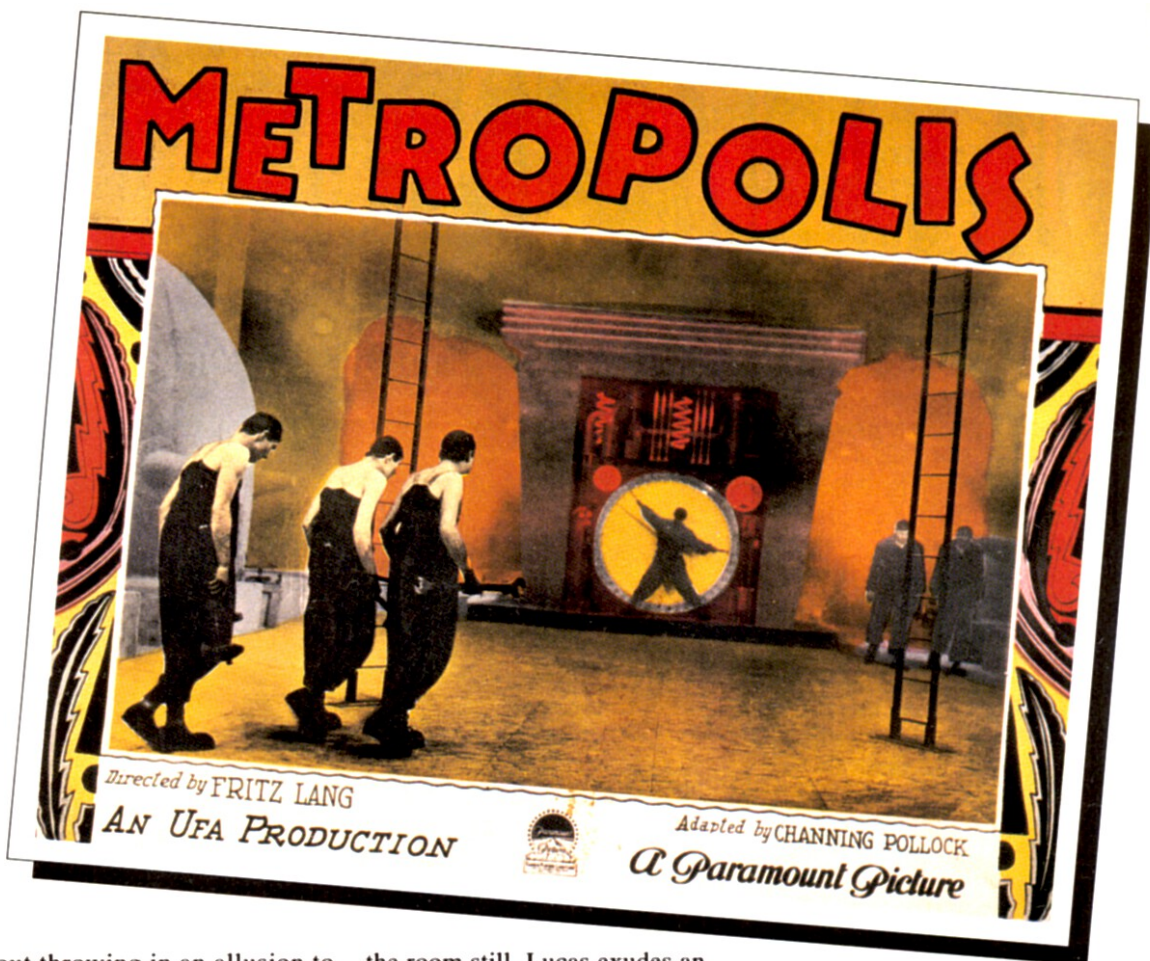
Although some prints include intertitles crediting Gustav Meyrink’s *Der Golem (1915)*, the film bears no resemblance to the novel. Elfi

In the 1980s, *METROPOLIS* was re-released with new music by Giorgio Moroder—a move that displeased advocates of authentic presentations.

Ledig’s essay, “Making Movie Myths: Paul Wegener’s ‘The Golem,’” traces other sources: the Polish version of the legend, the Prague version, other stories related to Rabbi Löw, biblical stories, and others. Wegener’s own addition to this melange was the eventual ruin of the Golem by a child. Meyrink’s novel, which exemplified much of the literature of the *frühe Moderne* (early modern period, 1890-1930), was a collage of mysticism, Kabbalah, Egyptian cultism, and other influences. Unwittingly or not, Wegener adapted this technique, recreating the literary style of the day on film: from a pastiche of other stories, a new plot line develops.

Lucas’s music is also informed by a host of genres: rock, avant garde jazz, folk, blues. Like other musicians writing for the Knitting Factory series, he touches on the music of 1950s science fiction films, the whirl of laboratory equipment creating unknown concoctions, manifestations of

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KIKI'S DELIVERY SERVICE

Disney begins dishing out anime treats

By Dan Persons

Who would have thought that within *anime* circles this year's most hotly awaited title would not involve giant robots, apocalyptic explosions, or beautiful babes in skin-tight bodysuits? Who would ever dream that it would instead be a kid's fantasy about an earnest, young witch finding her way in the big world? Well, the fans themselves, of course. The film we're talking about is not a piece of juvenile pap but an incandescent adventure titled **KIKI'S DELIVERY SERVICE**. The excitement is understandable. KIKI's entry to these shores represents only the vanguard of a distribution deal cut by the mouse-house itself, Disney. They will release worldwide the full catalog of one of Japan's most acclaimed *anime* directors, Hayao Miyazaki.

Miyazaki is not a total stranger to American distribution: Troma snapped up his **MY NEIGHBOR TOTORO** (which subsequently found a permanent slot on Fox Home Video's family roster), while Streamline Films put out the giddily kinetic **LUPIN III: THE CASTLE OF CAGLIOSTRO**. However, Disney's release of **KIKI'S DELIVERY SERVICE** represents the first time that considerable marketing muscle has been put behind his work. It is also somewhat ironic, since Miyazaki has come to be known as the Disney of Japan. As a first taste of the filmmaker's wide and complex *oeuvre*, Disney couldn't have picked a more apt title. A 1989 blockbuster hit in Japan (where it is known as **MAJO NO TAKKYUBIN**), **KIKI'S DELIVERY SERVICE** tells the tale of young witch Kiki. On her thir-



Disney used top vocal talent for the English version of **KIKI'S DELIVERY SERVICE**: Kirsten Dunst voiced the titular witch, and the late Phil Hartman dubbed her cat, Jiji.

teenth birthday she must, as tradition dictates, leave home to prove herself and her abilities without the assistance of her parents. Straddling a broomstick and accompanied by her sidekick, the acerbic black cat Jiji, the girl sets up shop in a seaside community that is classic Miyazaki: a sun-blessed nowhere, where biplanes coexist with transistor radios and where the natives find black-and-white television is as miraculous a phenomenon as a young practitioner of white magic. With few skills beyond her ability to fly, Kiki promotes herself as the titular delivery service, discovering in the course of her adventures stores of strength she never knew she possessed and (as is the director's wont) also learning a few potent lessons about the need for harmony between nature and humankind.

Miyazaki fans will recognize in **KIKI** many of the director's distinct tropes: a young, resilient heroine just beginning to discover the extent of her own powers; a qua-

si-European society that borrows cultural and technical elements across all the decades of the 20th century (it's steampunk with a humanistic spin); and a world at once daunting to its young protagonists, yet inviting as well—an adventure waiting to happen. An avid aviation enthusiast, Miyazaki imbues **KIKI**'s flying sequences with an alluring veracity—this gift of flight is no simple magic trick, but rather a power that clearly flows from Kiki herself and serves at her direction (most of the time). The director himself animated many of the flight sequences, and the identification between artist and his art is never more apparent—such moments as Kiki's disastrous introduction to her townmates, her broomstick spinning out-of-control amidst a tangle of traffic, show a freedom and love of the craft rarely seen in commercial animation.

The personal passion invested in **KIKI** is nothing new for Miyazaki. It was evident in the

early '60s during his days as an in-betweener at Toei Animation. His vision moved his career along briskly. He became a protégé of director Isao Takahata and rose up the production ladder to become a major guiding force on 1968's landmark **TAIYO NO OJI HORUS NO DAIBOKEN (THE LITTLE NORSE PRINCE VALIANT)**. In the 1980s he and Takahata formed Studio Ghibli.

Miyazaki has built a body of work that has managed to conquer the commercial market while remaining deeply personal. Films such as **NAUSICAA OF THE VALLEY OF THE WIND (1984)** and **LAPUTA: CASTLE IN THE SKY**

(1986) mix strong ecological themes with the director's fascination for antique aircraft. Practically all his works revel in the strength of their indomitable, female protagonists. They find their antagonists more in the personal barriers that each hero must overcome than in any external conflict.

Having spun a steady string of box-office hits, it was only a matter of time before Miyazaki was courted by international distributors. The problem was that, with such a deep, personal investment in his work and the financial success to be able to pick and choose his associates, the director was not about to give up control of his work. In the 1980s New World re-edited, redubbed, and retitled **NAUSICAA** into **WARRIOR OF THE WINDS**—a mere shadow of its former self. Miyazaki would not let it happen again.

The deal eventually struck with the mouse-house was nothing short of landmark. While the financial terms are still secret, the artistic terms are not: Disney has agreed to dis-

VICE

on video.

tribute the Ghibli catalog with minimal alteration. The American conglomerate, for its part, has responded by treating the release of these films as genuine, international events. They have gone all the way to creating a new label for the package—the “Animation Celebration” series—and mounting the redubbings with all-star casts and top-line translations.

Judging by the standard of KIKI, it looks as if Disney will stay true to its word. With the exception of two, new Sydney Forest songs for the opening and closing credits, the company has remained admirably faithful to the spirit and letter of Miyazaki's original vision. The star-power and appropriateness of the voice casting reflects the company's serious commitment to these films: Kirsten Dunst was recruited for the role of Kiki; teen heartthrob Matthew Lawrence plays town nerd Tombo; Janeane Garofolo was picked for the down-to-earth artist Ursula; while—in a casting move that lends a bitter-sweet note to Miyazaki's sunny outlook—late comedian Phil Hartman adds a sardonic note to the voice of Jiji.

Having passed this first, crucial test (albeit an easy one—KIKI's upbeat atmosphere makes for a comfortable fit in Disney's roster of family titles), the company now seems well set for treating the rest of the Ghibli roster with similar respect. Next up will be the eagerly awaited PRINCESS MONONOKE, a vivid, adult-oriented eco-fable that stands as the number one box office hit in Japan. It will first be released theatrically through Disney's Miramax arm. The Animation Celebration series will next offer CASTLE IN THE SKY (the LAPUTA having been dropped in deference to Spanish-speaking audiences for

whom the phrase *la puta* means not “young girl seeking adventure in the wide, wonderful world” but “whore”) sometime in 1999. Other titles, including NAUSICAA and Takahata's PORCO ROSSO and POM POKO, are in the package, although release dates have yet to be scheduled.

The timing, for Disney, couldn't be more fortuitous. As the company strives, with such titles as THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME and MULAN, for a gravity that has long been missing from its own efforts, Miyazaki, as quoted in *The Encyclopedia of Japanese Pop Culture*, has demonstrated he's long dwelt in realms where his American collaborators now wish to go: “Japanese today have nothing to rely on in their minds. They have alienated themselves from their own

Kiki uses her broom-flying ability to run a delivery service in Hayao Miyazaki's anime hit, the first of several skedded for video release.

natural and spiritual environment. In my movies for children I want to express, before anything else, the idea that the world is a profound, multifarious, and beautiful place. I want to tell them that they are fortunate to have been born into this world.”

Phil Hartman, speaking for the KIKI press notes, may best have summed up the impact of these upcoming releases for American audiences: “I feel this is the beginning of an important wave of entertainment that is coming into our country, bringing cultures closer together as the world gets smaller. Introducing Miyazaki to America is really significant—it is a great gift that comes from the other side of the Pacific.” □



PRINCESS MONONOKE: When will Miyazaki's masterpiece reach U.S. screens?

By Steve Biodrowski

Japan's official entry in the foreign language category was overlooked by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences earlier this year. It did not even receive a nomination. Consequently, a planned subtitled, art house release last Spring (to capitalize on the expected Oscar recognition that never came) was pushed back to an unspecified date next year, while Miramax took time to dub the film into English.

In its native country, where it was voted the equivalent of an Academy Award for Best Picture of the Year, PRINCESS MONONOKE became the biggest box office hit ever (surpassing E.T.). This excellent work from anime auteur Hayao Miyazaki deserves to be seen by every lover of animation and fantasy cinema in this country as well. It is an absolute masterpiece, one of the best films of its kind—or any kind, for that matter. The usual pastoral beauty one expects from Miyazaki's work is on display here, but this time it is coupled with the bolder tone of an adult action-adventure film; though nowhere approaching the sex and carnage level of WICKED CITY or UROTSUKI DOJI, the film is safely in the PG-13 category. Thankfully, the violence has strong dramatic (rather than gratuitous) impact, thanks to an engaging story of forest gods, animal spirits, an orphaned child raised by wolves, and a put-upon hero thrust into the middle of an apparently unresolvable conflict. All this while he seeks to lift a curse placed on him by a demonic beast that attacked his village. In short, it's at least twice the film that Disney's MULAN is.

My only qualm comes from the dubbing perpetrated by a distributor that has had record-breaking success with foreign language films in the past (e.g., IL POSTINO and LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE). Miramax, please, release an English-language version to the multiplexes if you must, but make subtitled prints available to fans and enthusiasts at the art house level. □

GODZILLA



Before the current GODZILLA (below), TriStar commissioned a previous version, inspired by recent Toho films like GODZILLA 1985 and GODZILLA VS. MOTHRA (inset).



Long before Roland Emmerich and Dean Devlin assumed control of TriStar Pictures' GODZILLA project, there was another script, another director, and an entirely different approach that was completely abandoned when the ID4 duo took over.

The deal between TriStar Pictures and the Toho Motion Picture Co. for an American version of GODZILLA was first inked way back in October, 1992. TriStar initially paid Toho \$400,000 and agreed to other, undisclosed terms for rights to make a big-budget adaptation featuring "A-list stars, screenwriter and director," according to press reports. The impetus for

by
Steve Ryfle

A IN AMERICA!

During his long trek to our shores, the green giant took an interesting detour.

the deal was said to have come from Godzilla's longtime American representative, the late Henry G. Saperstein, who had co-produced several monster films including *MONSTER ZERO* and *WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS* with Toho in the 1960s. "For ten years I pressured Toho to make one in America," Saperstein told *Filmfax* magazine in 1994. "Finally they agreed."

TriStar placed an ad in *Variety* showing the giant silhouette of Godzilla towering over the TriStar Pictures headquarters in Culver City, California, and announcing an anticipated 1994 release—a date that would allow *GODZILLA* to capitalize on the dino-mania that Steven Spielberg's *JURASSIC PARK* would generate the year before. Summer 1993 came and went, and *JURASSIC PARK* fulfilled all expectations in terms of its realistic-looking dinosaurs and its gargantuan boxoffice success. But when 1994 arrived and it was time for Godzilla to ride the big T-Rex's coattails (or, more appropriately, its tail), the monster was still appearing in Japanese films like *GODZILLA VS. MECHA-GODZILLA* and *GODZILLA VS. SPACE GODZILLA*, and seemed to be having trouble getting a U.S. work visa.

In May 1993, it was announced that screenwriters Terry Rossio and Ted Elliott, who had done major rewriting on the animated Disney feature *ALADDIN* (1992), had been hired to write an original *GODZILLA* script. Rossio and Elliott seemed an odd choice for such a big assignment, especially in comparison to other, higher-profile writers who were also



Godzilla makes his long-awaited appearance in New York. TriStar had been trying to mount an Americanized version of the Japanese monster since 1992.

considered. They included horror kingpin Clive Barker, who reportedly came up with story ideas that the studio considered "too dark," and *PREDATOR* screenwriters Jim Thomas and John Thomas. Throughout 1993, no mention was made about a director, although both Tim Burton and Joe Dante were widely rumored to be the studio's top candidates, probably because both had previously paid homage to the King of the Monsters: Burton gave Godzilla and King Ghidorah camp cameos in *PEE WEE'S BIG ADVENTURE*, and actual footage from *GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE* was later inserted into his *MARS ATTACKS*; Dante parodied Godzilla in his low-budget comedy *HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD*.

When Rossio and Elliott turned in their first draft script, simply titled *GODZILLA*, on November 11, 1993, there was still no word as to who would helm the picture. By Spring 1994 there were rumors that the project had been turned down

by everyone on TriStar's short list, including Ridley Scott, James Cameron, Robert Zemeckis and—prophetically, as it later turned out—Roland Emmerich, who had recently made *STARGATE*. The studio had also talked to several second-string (but nonetheless respectable) candidates, including Sam Raimi (*EVIL DEAD*), Barry Sonnenfeld (*ADDAMS FAMILY*), and Joe Johnston (*THE ROCKETEER*).

In May 1994, TriStar Pictures announced publicly that it was seeking a director for *GODZILLA*; two months later, in July, the studio found its man, Jan DeBont, who had just scored a major summer hit with his first film, *SPEED*. As Hollywood's newest blockbuster-maker, DeBont had his pick of big projects at several studios, and TriStar Pictures agreed to pay the director more than \$4 million to woo him into the *GODZILLA* camp.

DeBont gave fans reason to believe Godzilla was in good hands, telling *Fangoria* maga-

zine that he had seen the original 1954 *GODZILLA* as a child in Holland and was wowed by it, and he even "really loved" some of the sequels. "The early ones are the best; the later ones where the big monsters start boxing now look really silly, but it used to be really funny," he said, adding that he had wanted to direct the American *GODZILLA* film for several years but the studio rebuffed his inquiries until he became director-du-jour. DeBont pledged to deliver a Godzilla with all the realism of modern special effects, but to retain the personable spirit that had made the Big G lovable over the

years. "I'm not going to make it less funny—there's going to be a lot of humor in this movie—but it must be amazing to see a monster that big, 250 feet tall, [that] looks real." DeBont assembled a team and set to work on pre-production in mid-summer 1994. He began by revising the script to suit his liking and searching for a special-effects company that could handle the ambitious film.

As details slowly began to leak out about the top-secret *GODZILLA* script, it became clear that TriStar was going to take major creative liberties with certain aspects of Godzilla mythology. The monster would have all-new origins, eschewing his atom-bomb beginnings. Though fearsome, Godzilla would play the role of Earth's defender against an alien creature called the Gryphon. The main character of the story was a female scientist determined to slay Godzilla to avenge the death of her husband, who was killed off in the first reel, during Godzilla's first appearance. In

GODZILLA!

G-FAN COUNTERATTACK

Reworking the classic character gets thumbs down.

A few days after *GODZILLA* opened on 7,000 U.S. movie screens, a convention honoring the titular monster was held in a Chicago suburb. Among the guests of honor were Haruo Nakajima and Kenpachiro Satsuma, two actors who portrayed Godzilla in Toho's long-running series of Japanese movies.

Midway through a screening of the \$125-million American remake, Satsuma—who played the monster from *GODZILLA 1985* to *GODZILLA VS. DESTROYER* (1995)—got up and walked out. “It’s not Godzilla—it doesn’t have his spirit,” Satsuma told fans at G-CON '98. Satsuma’s reaction is understandable, given his stake in Godzilla lore. But everyone, it seems, from movie critics to general cinema-goers, rated the film a monster let-down. And the most vociferous attackers by far are the unabashed, self-proclaimed Godzillaphiles, who take the mutoid reptile to heart.

After waiting years to see their hulking hell-beast stomp cities and exhale radiation breath via modern special-effects, G-fans were instead given an outsized iguana that burrows underground, cats fish instead of nuclear reactors, runs away from the military, blows wind instead of flame, makes goo-goo eyes with Ferris Bueller, and is easily killed with a few missiles.

“[Emmerich and Devlin] said they’d do for Godzilla what Tim Burton did for Batman,” said Dennis Bent, a G-CON attendee. “But instead, they remade *THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS* and called it *GODZILLA*. They took away his breath, his indestructibility, and everything they thought was unrealistic or hokey, and turned him from a monster into this big, dumb animal. Godzilla’s identity is well established—everybody knows he doesn’t lay eggs or flee from tanks. You can’t screw with Godzilla in a major way and expect the public to accept it.”



Inset: Haruo Nakajima, the man in the suit in the classic Godzilla films, disliked TriStar’s CGI version (above).

Story and monster mayhem aside, even the creature’s much-anticipated new design failed to wow the hard-core fans. Eschewing the upright attack-stance, maple-leaf back fins, and familiar face of the original, Patrick Tatopoulos’ monster hunches low to the ground, and has sharp dorsal spikes, a long snout with a pronounced chin, and ingrown teeth. Sure, it’s light years ahead of its rubber predecessors, but fans say Newzilla is a generic, GGI-era monster—more a hybrid of Stan Winston’s dinosaurs and H.R. Giger’s aliens than anything resembling its Japanese namesake.

The revamp was the last straw in what some fans saw as Centropolis snubbing and disinforming the Godzilla crowd, for “Ameri-Godzi” mirrors several drawings that were leaked on the Internet last year—drawings that Devlin repeatedly insisted were fakes, a move which, detractors say, gave everyone false hope that Godzilla would still look like Godzilla.

“Unfortunately, Emmerich and Devlin thought they could ride the fame of *ID4* and re-create Godzilla despite the input of the fans,” said John Rocco Roberto, publisher of *Kaiju Fan*, a Japanese sci-fi fanzine. “It’s a problem with Hol-

lywood as a whole—telling the public what it should like instead of giving the public what it wants. This is reflected by both men’s arrogance towards the fans. They intentionally lied about the Internet images [and said] Godzilla would have his atomic breath. After all this, I am surprised that they are surprised at the fan opinion.”

With such criticism of their monster epic, the filmmakers have been a bit thin-skinned. When fans sniped at the film on the G-Board, a bulletin board on the official *GODZILLA* website (www.godzilla.com), Devlin responded with curt counter-salvos. “Our movie did what it was supposed to do. We’re all happy about it. If you don’t like that, to hell with you,” he told one critical fan. In other Internet postings, Devlin said the film would make a \$100 million profit and that a sequel would be announced soon—boastings which, in light of boxoffice performance, seem unlikely. About a week after the film’s release, the G-board was removed from the *GODZILLA* web site—ostensibly, not due to endless critical postings but because, as one Centropolis official said, “this board is starting to be used by others against us,” whatever that means.

GODZILLA grossed about \$74 million during its six-day opening spate—impressive if not for Sony’s pre-release “Size Does Matter” hype, which led many to believe the film could break the \$90-million Memorial Day weekend record set by *THE LOST WORLD*. But in weeks 2 and 3, the lizard’s boxoffice plummeted to \$23 million, then \$10 million. By July, *GODZILLA* was out of the top 10 and its cumulative gross fizzled at about \$135 million.

Emmerich and Devlin have said *GODZILLA* is the first entry in a trilogy, and although nothing is official, rumors have circulated that the second installment would pit Godzilla against King Ghidorah on the west coast.

But the outlook could be bleak. *GODZILLA*’s domestic run barely recouped Sony’s production costs, and the studio also spent about \$50 million on marketing. Under the *GODZILLA* licensing agreement, Toho received a fee rumored at \$10 million, and it gets virtually all profits when the film is released in Asia, eroding Sony’s take. Theater owners, who surrender most of their opening-weekend receipts to the studio, were short-changed when the film dive-bombed quickly. And merchandise licensees got burned twice—first, when Sony’s “hide the monster” ploy forbade them from selling any Godzilla merchandise before opening day, and again when the stuff failed to sell.

If Sony passes on *GODZILLA 2*, it is rumored Toho will revive its own series, releasing a new G-flick in Japan on the eve of the millennium.

Even though *GODZILLA* may have been a monster mis-step, some fans believe the ultimate Godzilla movie, delivering the monster’s hell-bent fury in state-of-the-art fashion, remains possible. “In the hands of a better writer and director, I still think it could be done right. And if it’s done right, I think it’ll be a hit,” said J.D. Lees, editor of *G-Fan* magazine.

Steve Ryfle

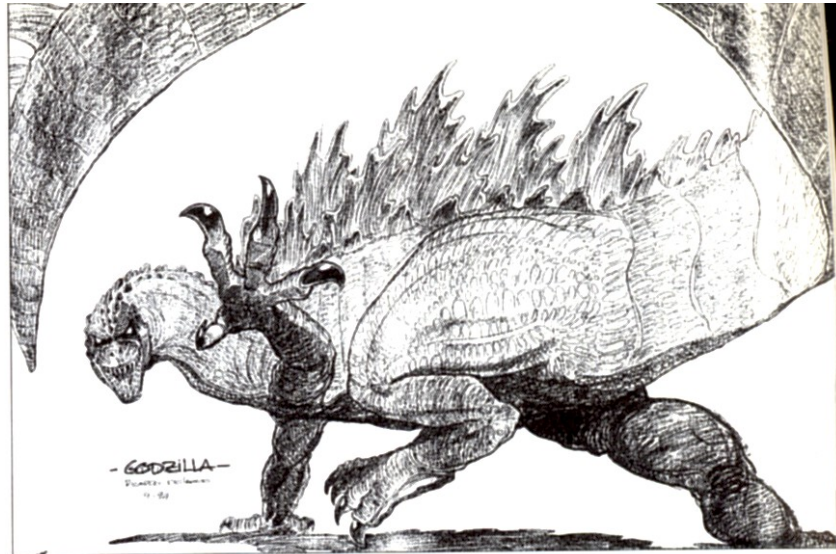
“I wanted to create something immediately recognizable as Godzilla but more realistic,” said Delgado. “I based my design on the original but added more.”

Spielbergian fashion, the scientist’s rocky relationship with her troubled young daughter would be mended by their Godzillian experiences.

In retrospect, Rossio and Elliott’s screenplay shows how difficult it is to create a credible Godzilla scenario for modern-day Western audiences. There are many possible directions to go, but which is most appropriate? Exploiting the “cheese factor” with a parody like the proposed *IT ATE CLEVELAND* seems a bad idea today, in light of the failure of Tim Burton’s *MARS ATTACKS!* In the post-*JURASSIC PARK* world, it’s clear that audiences like their dinosaurs as realistic as possible, but Godzilla has an established reputation abroad as a campy icon, so how are these conflicting notions resolved? Should the writer ignore the past and create an entirely new Godzilla, as did Fred Dekker’s aborted project of the early 1980’s, titled *GODZILLA, KING OF THE MONSTERS* in 3-D? Will audiences accept a U.S.-made Godzilla movie that is thematically linked to the Japanese series? Is Godzilla the villain or the hero?

Rossio and Elliott’s take on

GODZILLA is hardly innovative: the characters, situations and structure are borrowed straight out of 1950s sci-fi movies, 1990s big-budget action movies and, of course, Toho’s *Godzilla* series; it has the familiar feel of a sequel, even while starting from the beginning. It is obvious the writers studied their subject matter, for their *Godzilla* behaves in much the same way as that of Toho’s Heisei (post-*GODZILLA* 1985) movies, as a powerful force of nature that does not attack mankind but reacts when provoked and defends his territory (in this case, not Japan but all Earth) from a hostile enemy. The writers’ most serious offense is their re-scripting of *Godzilla*’s origins: although a low-level nuclear explosion triggers the monster’s premature awakening, *Godzilla* is not really an atomic aberration in this story. This is the screenplay’s greatest shortcoming, for it erases *Godzilla*’s inherent antinuclear subtext and metaphorical value, but it is probably more a reflection of the times than anything else. A blockbuster-style *GODZILLA* must appeal to the broadest common denominator, not merely the sensibilities of the hard-core fan; therefore, the scenarists



Roger Delgado designs for the abandoned *GODZILLA* retained the essentials of the original character while updating the monster with realistic details.

chose to replace the somber message of Ishiro Honda’s original *GODZILLA* (1954) with a standard, 1990’s-style action drama with sci-fi and monster elements. A *Godzilla* created by an ancient, high-tech civilization (coincidentally, a theme subsequently used in 1995’s *GAMERA, GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE*) might have been hard for purists to swallow, but it is a plausible new back story with interesting possibilities. As written, this *Godzilla*, like his Japanese counterpart, is neither friend nor foe but an unstoppable, fearsome creature that causes untold damage and casualties, yet one that must be respected and reckoned with if mankind is to survive. The subplot about the scientist Vaught’s search for dragons in the modern world further suggests that *Godzilla* is a mythological creature, a symbol of the unknown like the legendary sea serpents that once haunted sailors’ dreams.

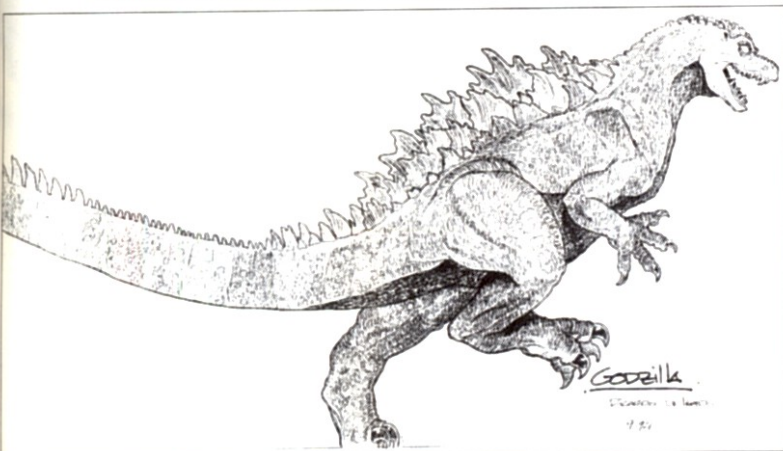
The writers also devised pseudo-scientific explanations for various phenomena (i.e., *Godzilla*’s breath is “ionized oxygen”) while creating a story full of fantastic flourishes. No one knows how the Gryphon would have panned out on film, but on paper at least the monster had the potential to be one hell of a doomsday beast, with its Gorgon tongue and the ability to instantly heal mortal wounds. The battle is complicated by *Godzilla*’s Achilles Heel, his susceptibility to the red-black liquid that acts like “*Godzilla*

Kryptonite,” rendering the great monster powerless. It’s not just New York City, but the entire Earth that hangs in the balance when the two monsters meet.

As for the human drama, it is much less imaginative, with stock characters like the goofy pseudo-scientist, the teenage rebel, the stiff military men. The most interesting character is Jill, who, as the writers admit, is a carbon copy of Ripley in *ALIENS*. Still, Rossio and Elliott could have chosen far worse movies to emulate, and the scenario they created is an interesting one. Rather than having the entire military operation focused on killing *Godzilla*, and one scientist trying futilely to save the monster, a more interesting conflict is established between Jill, determined to avenge her husband’s death, and Vaught, who wants to capture *Godzilla* and figure out what it is. Through their efforts to stop *Godzilla*, and then to aid the monster in his battle with the enemy, the characters’ relationship evolves from hostility to respect and friendship.

Of all the American *Godzilla* scripts written to date—including that which was eventually made into TriStar’s *GODZILLA*—this story was by far the most faithful to the original character and the tone of Toho’s classic *Godzilla* films, particularly the giant-monsters-meet-space-aliens films of the 1960’s like *MONSTER ZERO* and *DESTROY ALL MONSTERS*. By attempting to transform *Godzilla* from an all-powerful villain into an Earth-defending hero within the span of one film

Dark Horse Comic artist Ricardo Delgado (*The Age of Reptiles*) envisioned a sleeker *Godzilla*, with dinosaur-like legs and feet on the familiar body.



G-FILMOGRAPHY

The dinosaur's exploits to date

by
Steve Biodrowski

GODZILLA, KING OF THE MONSTERS (1954/56) ★★★★★

A dark, somber masterpiece, the original Japanese version, GOJIRA ranks as one of the finest works of science-fiction ever filmed, not the guilty pleasure we've come to expect in America.

GODZILLA VS. DESTROYER (1995) ★★★1/2

An excellent (though admittedly flawed) consummation of the series. The death of Godzilla is not only a special effects spectacle; it's also surprisingly moving.

GODZILLA VS. MOTHRA (1964) ★★★1/2

Best of the first wave G-sequels injects humor without making fun of Godzilla himself, as when two greedy capitalists are too busy fighting each other to get out of a building that topples on their heads—now that's what I call satire!

GODZILLA VS. MECHAGODZILLA (1993) ★★★1/2

The most spectacular of the Toho films also has a sophisticated, ambiguous approach to Godzilla: for the first time, we're asked to identify with him in a fight against not alien invaders but human technology. Humanity gets the monsters it deserves, the film says, and they'd just better get used to it.

GODZILLA VS. MOTHRA (1992) ★★★1/2

One of a half dozen new wave G-films that Sony didn't want you to see before their aborted mess, this beautiful fantasy erases any lingering memories of the campy '70s sequels.

The series slid downhill in the '70s, though GODZILLA VS. HEDORAH was still fun.



KING KONG VS. GODZILLA fails to live up to its title, but the Japanese version is an intentionally amusing comedy, unhampered by added American footage.

GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDORA (1991) ★★★

A complex time-travel plot reveals the origin of Godzilla—once an innocent animal mutated into a monster by H-bomb testing.

DESTROY ALL MONSTERS (1968) ★★★

A fast-paced confection marred by some obvious miniatures but overall highly entertaining—light-hearted and energetic, without the silliness of other G-films at the time.

GODZILLA VS. BIOLANTE (1989) ★★★

A colorful piece of science-fiction, filled with great ideas and effects. Unfortunately, the ideas are spoken rather than dramatized, and the mix doesn't always gel, but the good stuff far outweighs the bad.

GODZILLA VS. SPACE GODZILLA (1994) ★★★1/2

Sequelitis sets in for the first time in the second wave G-sequels. Elaborate effects and good character development for the humans is offset by a return toward the good-guy Godzilla portrayal of the '60s.

GODZILLA RAIDS AGAIN (1955) ★★★1/2

A weekly plotted sequel that nonetheless retains much of the mood of the original. A wonderful final shot, in which the hero sheds a tear for his fallen comrade, contains more emotion than the entirety of the TriStar flick.

MONSTER ZERO (1966) ★★★1/2

Minimal G-footage as the film focuses on human attempts to thwart an alien invasion. Still, it's a fun effort, and the monster rampage at the end is nicely done.

GODZILLA 1985 (1984/85) ★★★1/2

Ruined by New Line Cinema for U.S. release, the Japanese version was an honorable attempt to return to the

nuclear themes of GOJIRA. The characterization is only adequate, and the film lacks the panache and imagination of the best G-flicks, but it is still a solid entry.

GHIDRAH, THE THREE-HEADED MONSTER (1965) ★★★1/2

The film that turned Godzilla into a hero is loosely structured with fadeouts that suggest a TV movie, but the monster antics are genuinely funny, and the big guy's redemption is at least as believable as Darth Vader's, and far more entertaining.

KING KONG VS. GODZILLA (1962) ★★★1/2

The Kong suit sucks and the American footage is bad. The Japanese version, however, is an intentionally funny parody of advertising. The monster battle is not realistic, but it was obviously intended to resemble a sumo match, and it works on that level.

GODZILLA VS. THE SEA MONSTER (1967) ★★★1/2

Pretty much a no-brainer that rockets along unhampered by seriousness. Great to see with an audience, which brings out the camp value. Favorite scene: the heroes break into a room in the villains' high-tech fortress—and realize it's a nuclear reactor!

TERROR OF MECHAGODZILLA (1975) ★★

Best of the '70s sequels, which ain't saying much, this dropped the camp but retained the Godzilla heroics. Not bad in its subtitled version, American prints are a hopeless mess.

GODZILLA VS. HEDORAH (1971) ★★

A mish-mash of conflicting elements, this film is so whacked-out that you can't quite get a handle on what it's supposed to be: a silly children's film or a frightening allegory. Not exactly good but fascinating in its own weird way.

SON OF GODZILLA (1967) ★★

One of the worst Godzilla designs mars this children's film, which is otherwise reasonably entertaining on its own level, with lots of monster action and laughs.

GODZILLA'S REVENGE (1969) ★★

A change of pace Godzilla effort, in which the monster exists only in the imagination of a young, lonely boy. The drama isn't as moving as intended, and the effects are mostly stock footage, but the film at least attempts to do something different.

GODZILLA (1998) ★1/2

Half a dozen good, not great, effects scenes can't save this from terrible pacing and ridiculous plotting that recalls the worst of Godzilla's '70s sequels. By the way, that wretched giant iguana is *not* Godzilla.

GODZILLA VS. MECHAGODZILLA (1974) ★

This film seems to exist to show that no matter how bad, a G-film must have at least one good scene; in this case, a weakened Godzilla is revived on a rain-slashed island by bolts of lightning. Otherwise, a bore.

GODZILLA ON MONSTER ISLAND (1972) ★

A nice attack on an industrial center is filled with spectacular explosions; otherwise, this is a monotonous collage of bad human scenes, monster stock footage, and a worn-out G-suit.

GODZILLA VS. MEGALON (1973) 0

Bottom of the barrel: stock footage, silly monster battles, an Ultraman look-alike, almost no story. It's also one of the most-seen G-films, thanks to a primetime network airing in the '70s. It's the film TriStar hopes you remember, because it makes their film look good. □

The original GODZILLA captured a tone more dark and depressing than even an Ingmar Bergman film.



(something that took Toho's Godzilla more than a decade), Terry Rossio and Ted Elliott probably tried to do too much. The story's biggest flaw is that Godzilla shares considerable screen time with the Gryphon, and isn't always the star of the show. Inevitably, the writers' over-zealousness likely contributed to a skyrocketing budget and the imminent derailment of Jan DeBont's tenure as director.

TriStar Pictures studio officials estimated that it would cost about \$180 million to shoot the GODZILLA script as written. More than 500 computer-generated effects shots were planned; by comparison, James Cameron's TRUE LIES (1993) had only about 150 such shots, the most ever until then. One of DeBont's first tasks was to begin working with Rossio and Elliott to develop a second draft with fewer effects, to reduce the budget.

The first choice for a special-effects house was Industrial Light and Magic, the company founded by George Lucas to produce creatures and effects for his STAR WARS sequels and, more recently, makers of the computer-animated dinosaurs of JURASSIC PARK. But ILM reportedly turned down the job because officials there felt the amount of computer effects required to make an all-digital GODZILLA, plus computer-generated explosions, fire and water effects, and the Gryphon's morphing transformation, was just too much for one company to handle. In October 1994, it was announced that the effects would be done by Digital Domain, the super-special effects house founded a year earlier by director James Cameron, creature creator Stan Winston, and IBM. The company was to split the work with Sony Pictures Imageworks (Columbia-TriStar's fledgling in-house effects unit) and Video Image in Los Angeles. Stan Winston Studio was contracted to design the new Godzilla and Gryphon, and to create life-like robotic versions of both monsters as it had done with the JURASSIC PARK di-

GODZILLA!

REVIEW

This monster mess is all hype, no bite.

GODZILLA

TriStar Pictures presents a Centropolis Ent. Production in association with Fried Films and Independent Pictures. Produced by Dean Devlin. Executive producers: Roland Emmerich, Ute Emmerich, William Fay. Director: Roland Emmerich. Screenplay: Roland Emmerich & Devlin, based on the character "Godzilla" owned and created by Toho Co., Ltd. and a story by Ted Elliott & Terry Rossio. Director of photography: Ueli Steiger. Editor: Peter Amundson. Production design: Oliver Scholl. Visual effects supervisor: Volker Engel. Godzilla designer and supervisor: Patrick Tatopoulos. Music: David Arnold. 5/1998. PG-13. 138 mins.

Dr. Niko Tatopoulos.....	Matthew Broderick
Philippe Roache.....	Jean Reno
Audrey Timmonds.....	Maria Pitillo
Victor "Animal" Palotti.....	Hank Azaria
Colonel Hicks.....	Kevin Dunn
Mayor Hicks.....	Michael Lerner
Charlie Caiman.....	Harry Shearer

by Steve Ryfle

At the beginning of Roland Emmerich's GODZILLA, a U.S. government agent interrupts biologist Matthew Broderick's study of mutated earthworms in Chernobyl. "Dr. Niko Tapa-popolis?" the agent asks. "It's Tatopoulos," Broderick corrects him.

In Emmerich and Dean Devlin's screenwriting textbook, the repeated mispronunciation of a multi-syllabic surname is supposed to elicit guffaws from the audience. So is the gruff army general who summons Broderick all the way to Panama and then inexplicably treats the biologist rudely and addresses him as "the worm guy." Also funny are stuttering military officers, a Brooklynite

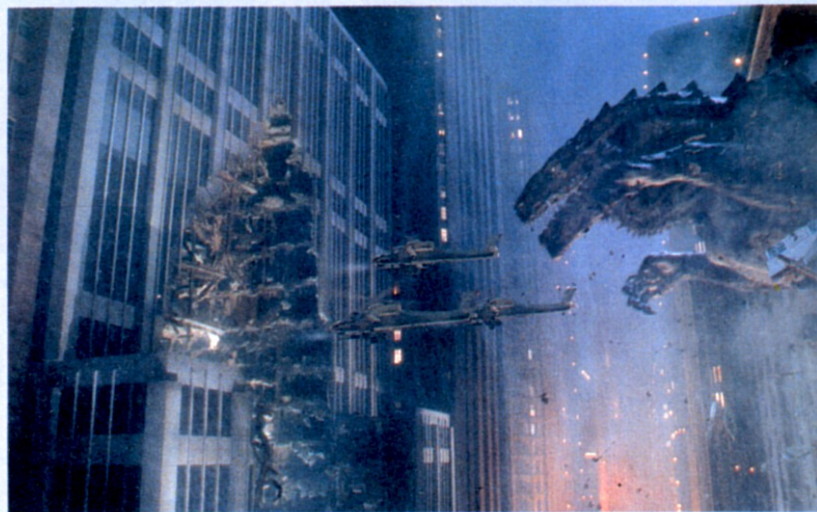
cameraman and his wife who say "axe" instead of "ask," a lame Gene Siskel-Roger Ebert parody complete with fat jokes, and a mysterious French agent who complains about American coffee and says "thank you very much" like Elvis.

Whom did Emmerich aim to please with his version of GODZILLA? Monster fans? This Godzilla isn't a monster, but an animal merely trying to survive in a hostile world. Children? This is hardly the ass-kicking creature lit-

tle boys surely expected, and there are no kids in the cast to identify with. SIMPSONS fans? The film has three of the cartoon's voice actors (Hank Azaria, Harry Shearer, Nancy Cartwright) but none of its wit. The French? Perhaps, for only Jean Reno escapes this debacle with his dignity intact.

It often seems Emmerich is embarrassed by his subject matter; the dumb jokes and one-liners are cynical, condescending winks to the audience. It's also obvious he wants to avoid reminders of the old Japanese films: not only is the creature itself totally different, but scenes that the audience expects to see in a picture called GODZILLA are missing. Where is Godzilla smashing buildings and incinerating entire city blocks? Where are the crowds fleeing the monster's onslaught? The fierce battles between Godzilla and the Army? The monster rearing back and bellowing his high-pitched roar?

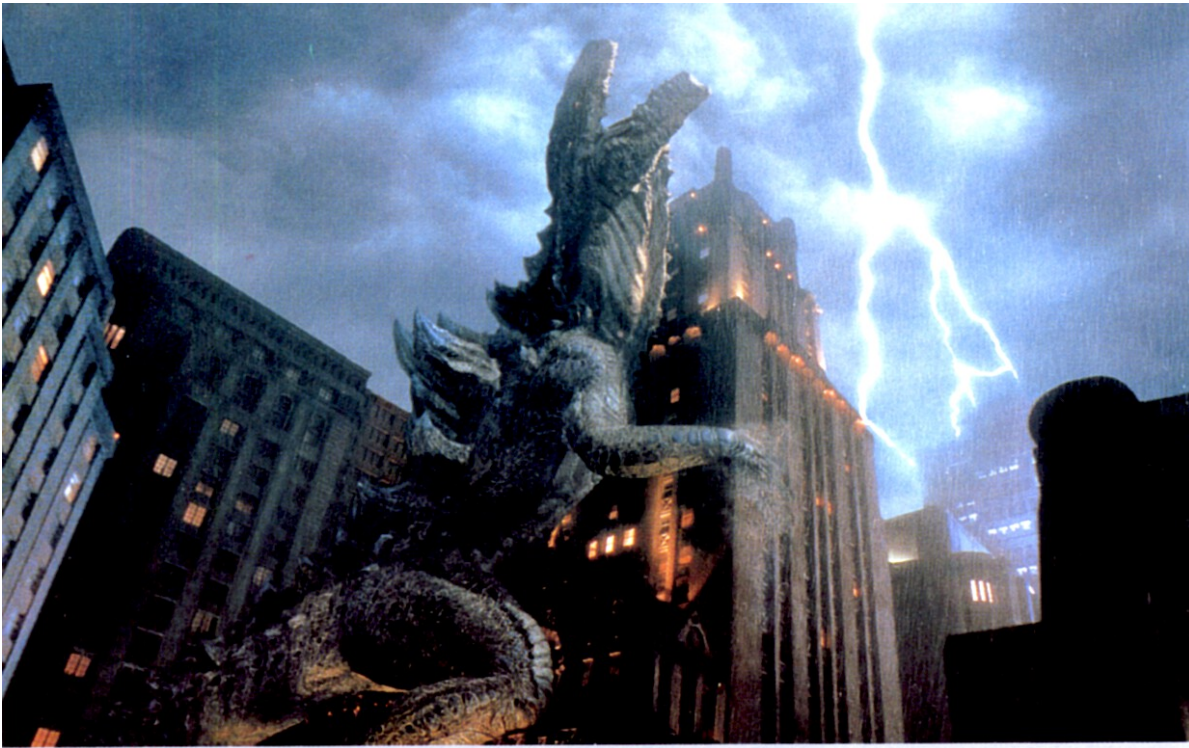
Wasn't the point of making a \$120-million GODZILLA the chance to relive these classic thrills with super-realistic special effects? Sure, a gigantic reptile jogging down Fifth Avenue is impressive, but the new GODZILLA is just a way for Sony to make its own upsized, dumbed-down



PREDATOR-type chameleon effects were abandoned, but the new Godzilla remains a stealth dinosaur capable of sneaking up on unsuspecting helicopters.



Although he can catch Apache helicopters with ease, Godzilla has trouble capturing a typical New York taxi cab—one of the film's many absurdities.



Godzilla embraces a skyscraper but neglects to topple it—one of many missed opportunities for spectacular action.

JURASSIC PARK without getting sued by Steven Spielberg. The experience leaves one wondering why they bothered, for the awe of seeing CGI dinosaurs for the first time is gone, and there's little else that's new.

The old-school, man-in-costume Godzillas weren't realistic, but their genuinely horrific undercurrent, fueled by Japan's fear of another nuclear war and reckless scientific advances in the atomic age, struck a chord. Emmerich and Devlin try vainly to create an atmosphere of dread by dousing the movie with rain, but gloomy skies alone do not equal subtext. The original Godzilla was a harbinger of doom, a living embodiment of nature's retribution against mankind. This new one is a gutless wonder whose only desire is to eat fish and give New York the ultimate pest infestation: a clutch of Baby Godzilla eggs. But once it leaves the concrete jungle, this Godzilla is quickly disposed of—far from his ominous, indestructible namesake, he's just a temporary nuisance in a "Don't Worry, Be Happy" world.

The first five minutes or so of GODZILLA are actually quite good, with stock footage of nuclear tests montaged with lizards in their island habitat; the inference is that one little reptile will grow up to be the Big G. This is followed by Godzilla's exciting attack on a Japanese ship, his claws ripping the hull. From here on, the story ranges from despicable (shirking America's responsibility for the arms race that spawned the original Godzilla, blaming France instead) to dull (the rekindled ro-

mance between Broderick's one-dimensional nerd scientist and Maria Pitillo's whiny, lip-biting, 30-something reporter wannabe) to ludicrously illogical (a 200-foot lizard hiding undetectably in the Manhattan subway system). It's also unbelievably bloodless; not even the expendable characters like the mayor and the pompous anchorman get squished.

As with INDEPENDENCE DAY, Emmerich apes his favorite blockbusters of the past, but this time he adds nothing to the formula. GODZILLA mimics JAWS and ALIENS; most regrettably, it tries to one-up the "kitchen scene" from JURASSIC PARK, with dozens of Babyzillas chasing the heroes through Madison Square Garden. This long, drawn-out and un compelling sequence glaringly shows how inferior Emmerich's talents are to those of Spielberg, who charges even his bad films with genuine thrills.

GODZILLA contains gaping plot holes. Why didn't all the bugs, birds, and fish exposed to the French nuclear tests also turn into gigantic animals? Why did Godzilla swim all the way to New York—and for that matter, how could it travel all that way without anyone photographing it? Why doesn't anyone mention the "power breath" weapon that Godzilla exhales? How come Godzilla can fit in the subways, but a taxi can elude him in the Park Avenue tunnel? If Godzilla runs at 500 miles an hour, why can't he catch the taxi? Everyone seems to know that the French nuclear blasts gave birth to the creature—so, why don't the French operatives help

the bumbling military instead of working undercover? The old fisherman says he saw "Gojira" (a scene replayed twice on video) but the origin of the monster's name is hardly explained. And why doesn't anyone—especially Broderick's character—object to the creature's slaying?

Even with such flaws, a big-budget Godzilla should still deliver jaw-dropping visuals, but strangely, the special effects don't pack much wallop. The sight of this new Godzilla was long kept secret, but it's a letdown when finally revealed, looking as if it's lost its dentures and bearing sleek, buffed-out arms and legs that are vaguely humanoid. And, despite all the "size does matter" hype, the monster really doesn't seem all that big because it's usually crouched low to the ground. And, the camera pulls back to provide a full-size view of the creature only

a few times—usually all you see is his feet, which gets pretty annoying. Sometimes it seems SFX supervisor Volker Engel is masking the flaws in his work by obscuring Godzilla with heavy rain, closed window blinds, or the darkness of deserted New York streets. Worst of all, this computerized Godzilla is devoid of personality, making it impossible to either love or hate him. He's not evil, for he never really attacks, but he's not that likeable either; when the humans kill Godzilla's brood, no sympathy is elicited from the audience, and even Godzilla's death brings no emotional response.

The filmmakers, probably wary of comparisons to the KING KONG movies, steer Godzilla clear of the Empire State Building and the World Trade Center, opting for less ambitious digs like the Flatiron and Chrysler buildings (both of which are destroyed by the military, not the monster). Most disappointing is that Godzilla never walks through Times Square—a stunt that Emmerich didn't have the guts or panache to pull off. There are nonetheless some spectacular moments, like Godzilla passing by a group of soldiers perched on a rooftop, and the grand finale where Godzilla chases a taxicab onto the Brooklyn Bridge, which shudders under the monster's weight.

GODZILLA isn't as bad as, say, BATMAN AND ROBIN, but it's far less entertaining than Emmerich's previous effort. INDEPENDENCE DAY had cardboard characters and a shallow story, too, but the cast was appealing and the film had a naïve sense of wonder and fun. GODZILLA is all hype and no bite, and a blown opportunity to make a truly good monster movie, for within Godzilla's roots lies a prophetic, frightening story still waiting to be retold for modern audiences. □

A mutant iguana with the chin of THE JUNGLE BOOK's tiger Sher Khan, the new Godzilla looks as if he lost his dentures, thanks to his ingrown teeth.



“They were talking about five times as many digital effects as had been done previously. It’s expensive, so that’s where negotiations broke down .”

nosaurus. The projected effects budget was reportedly \$38 million to \$50 million, and the cost of the entire film was pegged between \$100 million and \$120 million, making it possibly the most expensive film to date. This was before WATERWORLD broke all records with a \$200 million budget; it was also just about the time TriStar’s first crack at making GODZILLA fell apart.

In November, 1994, DeBont sent crews to a remote town on the Oregon coast to construct the set of a Japanese fishing village. He planned to shoot Godzilla’s attack on the Kuril Islands (a scene that was to occur early in the movie); Godzilla and storm effects would be added to the exterior footage later using computers. It was a test of sorts. This early shoot, well before the start of principal photography (a cast hadn’t even been selected yet) would help eliminate bugs in special effects technology. It also was to be used in a teaser trailer shown in theaters across the country in the summer or fall of 1995. If all went well, DeBont hoped to begin shooting in March, 1995, and the picture would hit theaters in summer 1996.

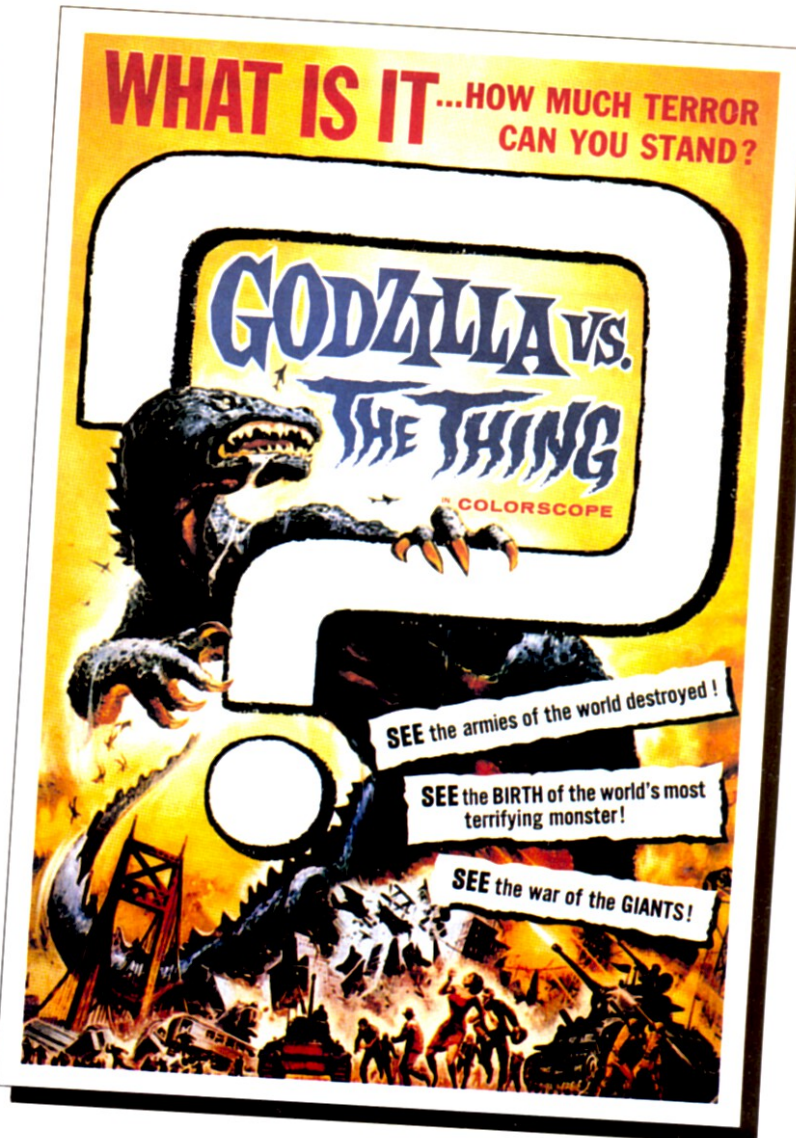
The Oregon sets were built, but no footage was shot.

With more than \$2 billion in losses in fiscal 1994, Sony was looking for ways to trim costs across the board, so when executives learned that GODZILLA’s budget was reaching historical proportions, they panicked. From October to December, 1994, a series of meetings was held between DeBont and TriStar production executives. At first, the question was how to tailor the script to eliminate unnecessary effects shots and lower the budget; then it became how to cut the effects budget even further by replacing CG technology with other, less expensive methods. Final-

ly, it became whether or not DeBont would make the film at all. “Sources said [DeBont] was waylaid by a studio that had promised absolute freedom,” reported *Variety*. According to various sources, DeBont required at least \$120 million to shoot the film his way, but the studio wanted to retool the project to keep it under \$100 million. In the final week of 1994, DeBont and TriStar announced that the director had jumped ship and would be replaced.

“They were talking about five times as many digital effects shots as had been done previously, and that was crazy,” said a Digital Domain effects man who worked on the aborted project. “DeBont didn’t understand what was involved in all of that. He knew what he wanted, but he didn’t know how to get there. He wanted a completely computer-generated Godzilla, which is certainly possible; it’s just expensive, so that was where negotiations broke down.”

In press interviews, DeBont defended his big-budget approach. He told *Cinefantastique*, “You either make it in a totally new way, where you absolutely believe this monster exists, or you make him like the Japanese do it, with a man in a costume, and then you can make it for \$10 million or less. But somewhere in between would be a big, giant mistake, in my opinion.” DeBont immediately began work on Universal Pictures’ TWISTER, which starred Helen Hunt and Bill Paxton, who were reportedly DeBont’s choices to play Jill Lewellyn and Nelson Flee, two of GODZILLA’s principal characters. Released in summer 1995, TWISTER contains much of the energy, pathos, and relentless pace that DeBont likely would have put into GODZILLA.



One of the biggest casualties of Jan DeBont’s debacle was the new Godzilla design, which was top-secret during the production and was never publicly displayed. DeBont and his production designer, Joseph C. Nemecek III (whose credits include TERMINATOR 2 and TWISTER) hired Dark Horse Comics artist Ricardo Delgado (*Age of Reptiles*) to re-design the creature. Delgado envisioned a sleeker, more agile version of the Japanese giant, incorporating elements of the JURASSIC PARK velociraptors but still strongly resembling Toho’s original design thanks to its dorsal fins and facial features. Delgado said, “I wanted to create something that was immediately recognizable as Godzilla, but that was more realistic and life-like than what had been done before. I was a huge Godzilla fan when I was young, and later on I had been able to see the original version

Dean Devlin said that leaked designs of the new Godzilla were actually fakes based on the artwork for GODZILLA VS. THE THING.

of GODZILLA (1954) without Raymond Burr, and that’s a very meaningful film. I based my design on the original Godzilla, but added more musculature to the lower body, with ‘chicken’ dinosaur legs and feet. The head, the face, the upper body and the tail were very much like the original Godzilla.

“It was a dream come true for me to work on this film,” he added. “I gave my paintings to Jan DeBont, and I also made a model. But they decided to go in a different direction, and all my design work was handed over to Stan Winston Studio, and they ended up changing the design somewhat, although it was still based on what I had done.”

At Stan Winston Studio, artist Mark “Crash” McCreery, famous for his JURASSIC

continued on page 124

CINEMA

By Steve Biodrowski

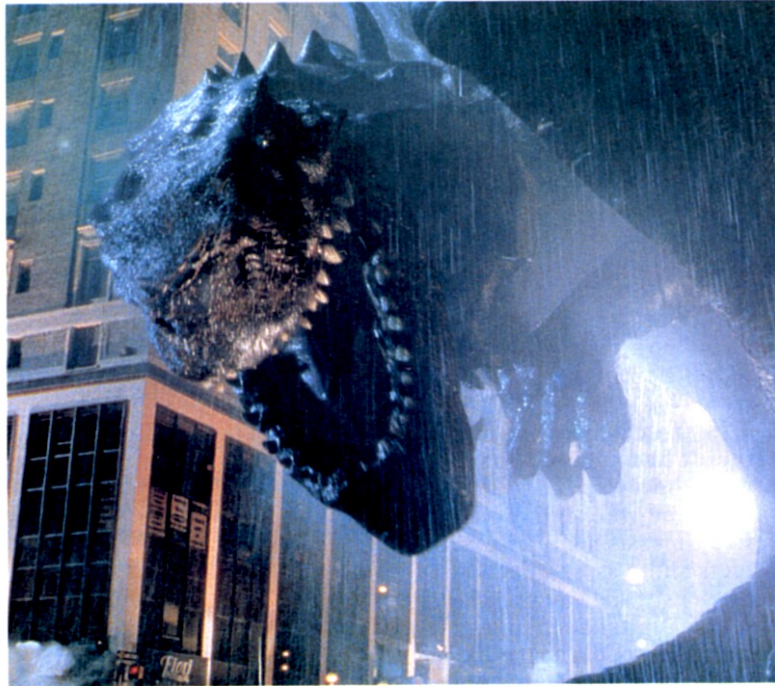
NUCLEAR DENIAL

Emmerich and Devlin ignore real historical horrors.

In the preface to his book *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde claimed that there is no such thing as an immoral book: "a book is either well-written or poorly written; that is all." At the time, he may have been right that aesthetics were the only criteria by which to judge works of art, but the realities of the 20th Century have rendered this notion quaintly out of date. When a film deliberately distorts history in the name of entertainment, then its makers should be called to account, and I can think of no more egregious example than *GODZILLA*.

Being an intentionally dumb summer, *GODZILLA* may seem a trivial thing to cause moral indignation; however, the character is more than the camp icon that Rolland Emmerich and Dean Devlin would have us believe. In a cinematic world filled with denial regarding the lethal use of nuclear weapons, *Godzilla* stands as reminder not only of Hiroshima and Nagasaki but also of the unfortunate fishing boat, *The Lucky Dragon*, which was irradiated by a nuclear fallout from the U.S. test of an H-Bomb in 1954. This incident, which resulted in the subsequent death of a crew member from leukemia, was as much an inspiration for the making of *GOJIRA* later that year as were the obvious American antecedents, *KING KONG* and *THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS*.

GOJIRA (which was Americanized into *GODZILLA, KING OF THE MONSTERS* for stateside release in 1956) dramatizes nuclear horror unlike any other film, before or since, because the fantasy element is clearly standing in for a reality too horrible to contemplate directly. This reality has been consistently downplayed by the media, in both fact and fiction. The first news announcement of the attack on Hiroshima described the atomic bomb solely in terms of its explosive output; the lethal long-range effects of radioactive fallout were not even mentioned. Since then, there has been a tendency in popular culture to view atomic weapons only as high-yield explosives, not as causes of cancer and leukemia. This has generally held true in Hollywood's dramatic re-enactments of the Hiroshima story (*THE BEGINNING OR THE END, ABOVE AND BEYOND*). Only the science-fiction genre, which has the benefit of being one step removed from reality, has been willing to explore the devastating side effects of radiation (e.g., *BENEATH THE PLANET OF THE APES*), but even these films have generally played out their scenarios



TriStar's fish-eater downplays the nuclear subtext that made the original unique.

in a far-future time setting, lacking any immediacy. Rare exceptions like *THE DAY AFTER* and *TESTAMENT* have dared to portray the radioactive aftereffects of nuclear war in a contemporary setting. But even these films retain a fantasy context of a sort—portraying something that *might* happen, not as something that *has* happened. My personal favorite example of this nonsense is right-wing polemic *THE FINAL OPTION*, in which anti-nuclear terrorists threaten to set off an A-Bomb. Their motive: if people could just once see the destruction caused, they would rethink their attitudes toward their country's nuclear arsenal. It never occurs to either the characters or to screenwriter Reginald Rose that the world has not already seen the result of nuclear weapons. We just choose to ignore what we've seen.

This denial reaches new heights of absurdity in the TriStar *GODZILLA*. The film gets off to an interesting start with some iguanas on a South Pacific island being irradiated by nuclear testing, but the impact is undercut by the film's insistence that it was French nuclear testing which was responsible for mutating one of these lizards into *Godzilla*. At least, that's what we're *told*—despite the fact that the nuclear explosions shown are the same old stock footage of U.S. tests that we've been seeing for years. Anyone who's old enough to remember will realize this, but *GODZILLA*'s target audience (young children, apparently—at least they're the only ones who liked the film unreservedly) will come away with the impression that the U.S. is entirely innocent in this regard. The film never, ever, in any way acknowledges the U.S.

role in developing and implementing nuclear weapons.

This creates big dramatic problems, because it leaves no reason for *Godzilla* to attack New York. Had the film admitted the United States' nuclear legacy, then there would have been a thematic reason (if not a plot reason—but that could be worked out) for *Godzilla*'s rampage: he would be taking the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and bringing them back home to the people who created and endorsed them. A country in denial about their atomic legacy would be forced to confront that legacy embodied in an unstoppable radioactive Behemoth—a walking nuclear nightmare that cannot be denied or ignored. The "return of the repressed" is one of the great recurring motifs in the horror genre, and *GODZILLA* could have provided this on an epic scale.

Instead, we get a giant iguana stumbling about in a would-be blockbuster that fizzles because it's not *about* anything, even on the most basic pop level. This leaves the characters with nothing to do except try to kill the monster; the attempts at drama are woefully silly. In *GOJIRA/GODZILLA, KING OF THE MONSTERS*, there was a real moral dilemma: should Dr. Serizawa (Akihiko Hara) use his Oxygen Destroyer to defeat *Godzilla* and, in the process, possibly reveal to the world a weapon even more devastating than the thing it's meant to defeat? Or should he keep his weapon a secret? There's no question of whether the device will fall into the wrong hands (at least not in the original Japanese version), because Serizawa has learned the painful lesson of Robert Oppenheimer: once the device is in *any* hands, its creator can no longer control it, and its use is almost inevitable. In this potent metaphor for the arms race, Serizawa resolves his dilemma by using his device only after destroying all his notes; he then kills himself along with *Godzilla*, to prevent the Oxygen Destroyer from ever being used again. What's the big moral dilemma in *GODZILLA '98*, on the other hand? Maria Pitillo steals her boyfriend's video tape and cries a lot about it before he forgives her.

This skirting of the nuclear issue is unforgivable. As much as we would like to think of it as old news, nuclear proliferation still haunts us (witness the rival testing in India and Pakistan the week the new film opened). *GODZILLA '98* was an excellent opportunity to address this. Whatever the aesthetic failings of the film, its moral cowardice is its biggest flaw. □

LASERBLAST

By Dennis Fischer

THE LIZARD KING Five Godzilla titles re-released and improved on DVD.

One good thing about Sony Pictures' release of GODZILLA is that it prompted a number of companies to make earlier GODZILLA pictures available on tape and DVD. Simitar Entertainment leads the charge with their DVD Godzilla series, beginning with the first and best of the Godzilla films, GODZILLA, KING OF THE MONSTERS!

This 1956 classic is offered on a two-sided DVD. The first side is the standard television version and the second side offers an almost identical "theatrical" version which is variously matted 1.66 and 1.75, trimming a little from the top of the frame and a tiny sliver of the bottom and adding a distribution logo to the beginning of the film. (On other Simitar releases, the bonus of a theatrical version is far more significant). The second side also offers another bonus, a so-called documentary that is actually a collection of highly faded science-fiction trailers with some added music and voice-over narration. (The trailers themselves vary from ROBOT MONSTER and THE GIANT CLAW to WAR OF THE WORLDS and KING KONG VS. GODZILLA).

All the Simitar releases promise five theatrical trailers, but the only one that plays on any title is the one for GODZILLA, KING OF THE MONSTERS. Also, each disc offers the same photo gallery, which is mainly composed of shots from Godzilla's '90s films plus the DVD cover artwork and preliminary sketches by Peter Bollinger. Each title is also given its own interactive trivia game: a set of multiple choice questions are responded to with clips from the film indicating whether or not you answered correctly. Each title has a scene index with eight to twelve chapters (though more would have been beneficial), with chapter one beginning after the main credits and subsequent chapters beginning before the sequence depicted. (There is a promise of four Godzilla screen-savers for people with Windows 95 and a DVD-Rom drive, which I was not able to check out).

Director Ishiro Honda's original GOJIRA was no B-movie (as it has often been described in America); rather, it took six months to



GODZILLA, KING OF THE MONSTERS (1956) is one of five classic G-films given a fine presentation on DVD that surpasses previous laserdisc releases.

complete. It is somber, serious, atmospheric, and builds an emotional power lacking from the rest of the series. Greatly contributing to its effectiveness is the gloomy, chiascuro lighting of cinematographer Masao Tamai, the memorable score by Akira Ifukube, and the attention paid to realistic details. We see how the tragedy impacts a large number of people; we are shown scenes of devastation that recall the atomic energy that spawned Godzilla; and for the only time in the series, we spend a few moments in the hospitals where the monster's victims lie.

GODZILLA was designed to be an adult film, and at its heart, it wrestles with a moral question. Dr. Daisuke Serizawa (Akihiko Hirata) has invented an "oxygen destroyer" which is potentially a more destructive weapon than the atomic bomb, and it is the only weapon powerful enough to destroy Godzilla. However, he cannot condone releasing such dan-

gerous knowledge to mankind which is likely to misuse it and so destroys all the papers relating to its manufacture. He finally decides to use it to end the reign of terror of the rampaging 400-foot reptile while also preventing the knowledge of the weapon's construction from ever being released (something which many have wished could have been done with our own atomic arsenal).

Additional scenes were added to the American version directed by Terry Morse and starring Raymond Burr, who plays American reporter Steve Martin and replaces the character of a Japanese reporter in the film. The interpolation of the new footage is cleverly done, and his explanatory voice-over means that only a few of the Japanese characters need to be dubbed, leaving much of the original soundtrack intact. (Burr simply explains what was said or asks a Japanese actor from the American footage to interpret). Both versions

of the film know the value of storytelling economy, unlike the massive budgeted successor, with the Americanized version running just under 80 minutes.

One bit of bizarre misunderstanding centers around reporter Martin's observation that, fortunately, Godzilla attacked the "dark side of town." Some commentators have mistakenly assumed this to be a racist comment; however, what Martin is clearly referring to is the industrial side of town which has only a small population at night (Godzilla is shown initially attacking energy plants and factories) and lacking the lights of the more populated bright side of town that Godzilla attacks subsequently.

This original Godzilla (portrayed by Haruo Nakajima and Ryosaku Takasugi as well as a hand puppet) is slow, powerful, and deliberate—an awesomely massive juggernaut that smashes anything in its path. Its resonant roar and thundering footfalls were distinctive (though the film does make the mistake of underscoring a wade through Tokyo Bay with the selfsame footfall sounds).

Subsequent outings gave the monster more personality but less menace as Godzilla squared off against other monsters. One of the best of these features is GODZILLA VERSUS MOTHRA, which is presented in its widescreen AIP theatrical version as GODZILLA VS. THE THING. Japanese special effects are meant to be more colorful than realistic, and so it is with this MOTHRA film. The colors in the widescreen print are slightly faded (especially compared to the bright colors of the recently released widescreen A.D.V. tape of DESTROY ALL MONSTERS), but the image is solid and clear without color noise and, except for a few frames that appear to have been repeated because of damage, is without blemish. The compositions benefit from being presented in their proper aspect ratio.

This was the last of the purely evil Godzilla pictures until the character was revived in GODZILLA 1985. Godzilla's design changed from film to film, and this film had perhaps the best overall design for the monster, embodying something that is both menacing and yet anthropomorphic enough

to be identified with.

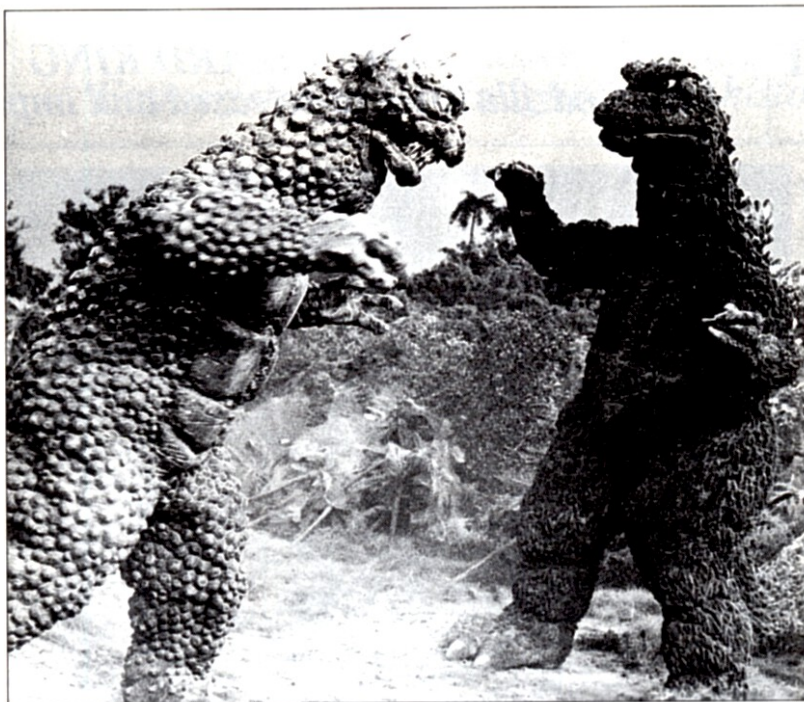
The story builds nicely around the mystery of a giant egg that is washed ashore in Japan. There are undercurrents of indignation at pollution, the lack of government intervention, and even a massive battle of the sexes (as Mothra is clearly depicted as a mother while Godzilla holds up his end as an aggressive male once he makes his belated appearance).

The film's main drawback is that condescending attitude towards Yoka (Yuriko Hoshi), the female newspaper photographer, who is so intent on doing a good job that she is criticized for taking too much time. There is also a not very subtle anti-exploitation theme in the picture that echoes the one from the original MOTHRA, as well as a call for universal brotherhood when Yuko begs the twin fairies (Emi and Yumi Ito) for Mothra's help. GODZILLA

VERSUS MOTHRA recalls when films were allowed to have a slow build to an exciting climax, and many consider it the best film in the series.

My favorite, however, is GODZILLA VERSUS MONSTER ZERO, in which director Honda grafted the alien invasion of Earth plot line of THE MYSTERIANS to the Godzilla series (a combination retained to lesser effect in subsequent films). The film greatly benefits from being seen in widescreen, and the widescreen print is much superior to the full screen television edition on the other side, which has a number of scratches and blemishes.

However, in MONSTER ZERO, the monsters do take a backseat to the human characters, though when they enter the film, they are used spectacularly. The film is replete with the bright colors courtesy of Haijime Koizume's cinematography and offbeat alien set designs (by Takeo Kita) that are the hallmarks of '60s science fiction films, with effects specialist Eiji Tsuburaya providing plentiful animated rays and 'Zilla halotosis, as well as some of the funkiest flying saucers ever seen. Glen (Nick Adams) and Fuji (Akira Takarada) make an appealing international team of astronauts, and Kumi Mizuno, Adams' love interest, is one of the most appealing Japanese actresses of the time. The story offers a number of surprises



Although Scimitar's GODZILLA releases include three of the best films, there are also a couple from when the series was in decline, such as 1969's GODZILLA'S REVENGE.

and is one of the most colorful of the '60s Godzilla films.

This is the film where Godzilla first danced his victory jig, detracting from his overall menace while providing more personality. He and Rodan are "borrowed" by aliens from Planet X who wish to defeat Monster Zero, better known as King Ghidorah, and are then controlled to attack the Earth as part of the treacherous aliens' plan. Ghidorah, who made his debut the year before, is the three-headed, flying golden dragon that was the most impressive of all of Godzilla's foes. (Undercutting the effectiveness of the film is its cornball, badly dubbed dialogue referring to the aliens as "rats" and "finks").

While the first three films in Simitar's series rank as the best Godzilla films ever, unfortunately, the final two rank among the worst and are only recommended for completists. GODZILLA'S REVENGE was released theatrically and is presented on one side in a 2.35 United Productions of America theatrical version, but while lasting only 69 minutes, it feels as long as Roland Emmerich's movie. Though directed by Honda, most of the monster footage was assembled from director Jun Fukuda's SON OF GODZILLA and GODZILLA VS. THE SEA MONSTER (effects expert Tsuburaya receives a credit, although he was too ill to participate and died shortly after the filming). The

main plot concerns Ichiro (Tomonori Yazaki), a lonely young Japanese boy whose daydreams of a chatty, goofy-sounding Minya, the son of Godzilla, inspire him to defeat a bully and foil some bank robbers as well.

While some have defended the film as "an excellent children's fantasy," for most it totally failed to provide the interest, spectacle, and mass destruction that fans had come to expect from Godzilla films. Additionally, it seemed to encourage kids to unwisely tackle dangerous situations and to stop bullies by becoming an even bigger bully. Any pretense of aiming at an adult audience is lost as Godzilla goes kiddie, with a consequent lessening of the budget, much to the detriment of the series.

The lack of budget is also very much evident in TERROR OF MECHAGODZILLA, the last of the Honda Godzillas, which was given a marginal American theatrical release in truncated form as THE TERROR OF GODZILLA. (You know the film is in desperate trouble when the aliens' spaceship is made out of pegboard and when the editing of the opening showing flashbacks from the previous Godzilla film is utterly incoherent). Presented only in a full screen version that crops the sides of the 2.35 Tohoscope image, the film is a sequel to GODZILLA VS. THE COSMIC MONSTER, which featured a giant robot version of

Godzilla called Mechagodzilla. TERROR also features Titanosaurus, a long undiscovered aquatic dinosaur that attacks Interpol's undersea submarine. A bitter discredited scientist named Mifune (a hammy Akihiko Hirata) agrees to help some aliens conquer Earth and sends Titanosaurus to attack Tokyo. Godzilla finally shows up, coming to the beleaguered city's defense for a change. The aliens plan to let the beasts tire one another out, and then send in a reconstructed Mechagodzilla (now labeled MG2) to take over everything by defeating the victor of the battle. Despite bringing back city-based battles, this was the least successful financially of the series in Japan, though it was actually better than most of the '70s Godzillas.

However, in its favor, there was no stock footage or annoying juvenile elements, no musical interludes or silly clowning. Unfortunately, Simitar has released the G-rated, 79 minute version of the film rather than the uncut 83 minute version that appeared on Japanese laserdisc. The brief flash of nudity when the aliens operate on Mifune's cyborg daughter Katsura (Tomoko Ai) is still missing as are several seconds of violence and/or bloodletting elsewhere in the film, creating a few abrupt jumps in the soundtrack and giving the editing a choppy feel that was not originally intended. Most significantly, Katsura's suicide, which causes Mechagodzilla to suddenly short-circuit, is still missing (the film makes it seem as if she was shot by one of the Interpol agents), eliminating the ending's pathos (a deliberate echo of Dr Serizawa's suicide in the first GODZILLA), as well as rendering it somewhat incomprehensible.

Overall, Simitar's DVD releases are quite welcome and popularly priced, a definite improvement on Paramount's laserdisc releases of these same titles. Godzilla has proven himself to be one of the most enduring monsters of all time, and his scaly image has adorned a vast variety of merchandise and inspired a host of horrific imitators and contenders for the throne. However, when it comes to destructive prowess and audience loyalty, one has to admit that the Big G is still the King of the Monsters. □

True horror hidden within the everyday, mundane world

APT PUPIL

TriStar Presents a Phoenix Pictures Production. Produced by Bryan Singer, Jane Hamsher, and Don Murphy. Directed by Bryan Singer. Screenplay by Brandon Boyce, from the book by Stephen King. Composer: John Ottman. Editing: John Ottman. Production design: Richard Hoover. Set decoration: Nancy Haigh. Visual effects supervisor: Kent Houston. Lounge lizard and demon effects makeup: Rob Bottin. Costume design: Louise Mingenbach. Director of photography: Newton Thomas Siegel. Sound (DTS/DOLBY digital/SDDS): Jay Meagher. Executive producer: Tim Harbert. Associate producer: Jay Shapiro. Co-producer: Thomas DeSanto. Rated R. 100 Mins.

Todd Bowden.....Brad Renfro
Kurt Dussander/Arthur Denker.....Sir Ian McKellen
Richard Bowden.....Bruce Davison
Ed French.....David Schwimmer

by Matthew F. Saunders

Too often these days, the only framework that distinguishes *cinéfantastique* from its dramatic brethren is a staple genre concept propped up by a large special effects budget: flying saucers invade Earth; mutated cockroaches infest Manhattan; ancient creatures attack museums, and so on. All audiences are left with when the pyrotechnics are over is a thin veneer of plot and, if lucky, some semblance of character development.

That's why director Bryan Singer's new film, *APT PUPIL*, is such a breath of fresh air. While not a perfect film, this adaptation of Stephen King's novella succeeds in restoring some of the faded luster brought on by recent genre efforts. Even though its fantasy-esque elements are limited to several disturbing dreams that the film's erstwhile protagonist, Todd Bowden (Brad Renfro), has about Nazi death camp victims, it is *APT PUPIL*'s reliance on the old Hitchcockian notion (often echoed on Rod Serling's *THE TWILIGHT ZONE*) of true horror lying hidden within the everyday and mundane world, that evokes the film's true terror.

As the movie opens, the 16-year-old Bowden, a straight-A, all-American high school student, becomes obsessed with studying the Holocaust. After his history class completes its unit on the period, he continues his studies independently and soon comes to believe an aged local man, Arthur Denker (McKellen), is a former SS officer. Armed initially with nothing but a photograph, he soon collects enough evidence to confront Denker, who denies the accusation at first but soon admits he's indeed the Nazi war criminal Kurt Dussander and has been secretly living in Bowden's hometown for years.

Bowden's scholarly interest quickly deteriorates, however, as he wields the threat of revelation over Dussander as a weapon of power. Pushing his advantage, he forces Dussander to reveal and re-live long forgotten memories, in the process unwittingly reawakening Dussander's own long-suppressed lust for power and control. Eventually, the old fires rekindle within Dussander and he begins re-embracing his old Nazi ways and resisting Bowden's manipulations. What follows is a slow, Machiavelian dance between the two as each grapples for advantage over the other.

It's on this level that the Hitchcockian no-



Apt pupil Bowden (Brad Renfro) shares a toast with neighbor and former Nazi Dussander (Ian McKellen).

tion of horror—not just of the hidden evil, but also the evil hidden within—works to greatest effect. The duel for dominance—the advantage trading hands frequently, and its true possessor is clouded by doubt and uncertainty—grants the film a palpable tension. That tension is enhanced as their battle of wills plays out against the innocent backdrop of their small quiet town, and within Singer's mostly confined, interior sets.

The ensuing claustrophobia imprisons both viewer and player alike, effectively mirroring, for example, the entrapment Dussander initially feels. It also frames the inevitable re-emergence of Dussander's Nazism. Played with chilling effectiveness by McKellen, Dussander's transformation proves more horrific than any typical lycanthropic or changeling transfiguration. As Dussander slowly re-embraces his heritage and begins asserting his will, the audience is carried through his metamorphosis, and his moments of seeming quiet and submission eventually belie a burgeoning, conniving strength. This transformation is made more profound as Bowden, the film's less-than-sympathetic protagonist, echoes Dussander's evolution on a much more raw, nascent level.

What ultimately proves intriguing about the film is this symbiotic relationship between Dussander and Bowden, who feed off each other and alternately—and often simultaneously—play both pupil and teacher. While Renfro's control of Bowden's transformation is less skilled than McKellen's, he effectively conveys the similarly stifling world in which Bowden lives. Just as Dussander has been forced to hide within the facade of suburban American normalcy, so, too, has Bowden. While Bowden's motivations are never adequately developed, nor as clearly defined as Dussander's, the illu-

sions of his life are plainly shattered by their association.

No longer constrained by or comfortable with society's conventions and norms, Bowden's actions become almost pathological, especially when juxtaposed against Dussander's (and ultimately McKellen's) more controlled, intellectual performance. Indeed, one of the film's largely unexplored questions remains whether or not Bowden's dissatisfaction preceded or resulted from their association. Nonetheless, as each becomes the other's tormentor, they also become apt pupils, exchanging potent lessons veiled within their dueling manipulations.

In the end, the evil that slowly corrupts them both is bound by the same thread that now ties them together. What the audience is left with is a meditation on not only the corrupting influence of power, but the genesis of "everyday" evil. While we can easily dismiss such popularized horror icons as Freddy Krueger and Jason as simple boogymen, we often find it too disturbing to fully address the lingering, existential questions surrounding the true nature of evil.

The seeds of those answers lie here, but no easy solutions are provided. McKellen and Renfro both deliver deeply interior performances, bringing a horrific unpredictability to their characters' actions that masks not only their true intentions, but a full explication of their evil ways. As a result, while enlightened, these questions remain unanswerable. Along the way, however, we're provided with a chilling metaphor for our times, as well as a grim reminder of the legacy of evil. And, as both Hitchcock and *APT PUPIL* warn, we have but to look down the street, and around the corner, to find it. □

ANIMATION

By Mike Lyons

THE FINAL ASSESSMENT Disney's latest lives up to its promise.

Earlier this year, a "work-in-progress" version of **MULAN** (Disney, 6/98, 88 mins, G) was screened for the press (a review of which appeared in *CFQ* 30:3). It was as if the studio felt that, even in this rough stage, with half the film still a haze of scratchy pencil sketches, it was strong enough to create positive word-of-mouth.

Disney had every right to be cocky. **MULAN** is a carefully constructed and powerful piece of filmmaking. Directors Tony Bancroft and Barry Cook have skillfully blended live-action visual influences with the graphic power of Chinese art (beautifully realized by the joint efforts of art director Ric Sluiter, production designer Hans Bacher and character designer Chen-Yi Chang). Whether it's the soft tones of Mulan's family garden or the curling "S" shapes of smoke in an explosion, there is not one image that's uninteresting.

This imagery is used as the backdrop for a well thought out script that spins around some of the conventions of the Disney formula. Although the film lists a roster of screenwriters (Rita Hsiao, Christopher Sanders, Phil Lazebnik, Raymond Singer, Eugenia Bostwick Singer), much of the credit must go to master storyboard artist Chris Sanders, for overseeing this unconventional tale. In **MULAN**, there is no grand opening production number; instead, an action sequence along the Great Wall sets the stage for the rest of the film. Most daring is the film's variation on the traditional, "boy-meets-girl" story, and romance is only hinted at, just before the final credits roll.

Then, there is Mulan herself (a wonderful, understated vocal performance by Ming-Na Wen, coupled with the amazingly heartfelt animation of Mark Henn) who may emerge as the most easily identifiable of all Disney's characters—klutzy, human, reflective and headstrong. Mulan is like all the characters in the film: not just concepts, insidiously designed to sell action figures. Each one emerges as a distinct personality.

MULAN also gives audiences a satisfying scene stealer in Mushu, the diminutive dragon sidekick. Eddie Murphy's streetwise urban delivery as Mushu has



MULAN (which was previewed as a work-in-progress in *CFQ* 30:3) shows Disney striving to move beyond its standard musical-comedy formula.

been captured perfectly by animator Tom Bancroft in great show-off, tour-de-force style.

The only minor disappointment may lie in its music. Though utilized very well within the story, the film's songs are not equal to the verve of **HERCULES** or the operatic tunes of **HUNCHBACK**. Still, it's not enough to dampen the energy, artistry, and beauty that's evident in **MULAN**.

There was a time when a film had to be popular to warrant a sequel. Thanks to home-video, that's no longer true. A good example of this is the direct-to-video **FERNGULLY 2: THE MAGICAL RESCUE** (4/98, G), a mediocre sequel to a mediocre original. Directed by Phil Robinson and written by Richard Tulloch, Part 2 essentially reverses the plot of its theatrical progenitor: the magical, fairyfolk of the rainforest now travel into the human world, instead of vice versa, their mission (to rescue baby animals who have been kidnapped by poachers) somewhat reminiscent of Disney's **RESCUERS DOWN UNDER**.

None of the magic and wonder of that film is here, however. The animation is of the usual video standards (not stiff enough to call poor, not fluid enough to keep your attention); the characters are of the cookie-cutter variety; and, unless you are too young to care, the film itself is in a league with

other DTV disappointments.

Director Ralph Bakshi's animated feature **AMERICAN POP** (Columbia-TriStar Home Video, 4/98 [1981], 97 mins, R) makes its delayed home video debut after a long battle over music rights. The film tells the tale (written by Ronnie Kern) of our country's musical heritage, tracking four generations involved in the music industry, from turn of the century immigration to the cocaine-riddled '80s. It opens with a montage of stylish paintings and sketches over a haunting instrumental medley which blends everything from Lynyrd Skynyrd to Gershwin. The images—from Vaudeville to The Beatles—are so evocative that it seems almost impossible to carry this feel throughout an entire feature. Bakshi succeeds, however, in a film that is highly compelling.

There's only one problem with this animated film: there is no reason for it to be animated. The story could have been told in live-action, and Bakshi seems to have known this, as the animation was created through rotoscoping (in which drawings are traced from live-action footage). The end result is more literal than surreal, removing any element of the fantastic that the film could have taken on. As a result, **AMERICAN POP** is engrossing and ambitious, but it's not the groundbreaking masterpiece it could have been. □

FILM RATINGS

- Must see
- Excellent
- Good
- Mediocre
- Fodder for MST-3K

DR DOLITTLE

Director: Betty Thomas. Screenplay: Nat Mauldin & Larry Levin, based upon the *Doctor Dolittle* stories by Hugh Lofting. Fox, 6/98, 85 mins, PG-13. With: Eddie Murphy, Oliver Platt, Ossie Davis, Peter Boyle; animal voices: Norm MacDonald, Albert Brooks, Chris Rock, Reni Santoni, John Leguizamo, Julie Kavner, Garry Shandling, Gilbert Gofried.

DOCTOR DOLITTLE, the tale of the doctor who talks to animals, has been revamped and updated for the '90s. Now, John Dolittle (Murphy) is having an identity crisis. He and the other two doctors in his practice have decided to sell out to an HMO. As the day to finalize the deal rapidly approaches, Dolittle starts to feel that he is choosing large sums of money in exchange for abandoning his patients. Stress and pressure mount to a point where he is convinced he has gone over the edge; he begins to hear the animals around him talking. While trying to figure out who he is and what is ultimately important, Dolittle goes from basket case to man on a mission. Slowly, he comes to appreciate his unique ability.

I had been forewarned to keep my expectations low. Either as a result of my diligent preparation, or not, the next 85 minutes proved to be pleasantly entertaining. Eddie Murphy is a funny man. He's best in the film when sharing the screen only with a mangy animal. A more restrained and subdued Murphy than the Axle Foley of **BEVERLY HILLS COP**, he is to be believed as the husband and father here. Unfortunately, the family dynamics are bland and underdeveloped—uninteresting at best, insulting at their worst.

Fairly preposterous although never unenjoyable, Dolittle dispenses psychiatric advice as easily as he does medical advice. He tells a self-proclaimed alcoholic monkey simply to stop drinking and tries to help the wife, in a couple of pigeons, to convince her husband that he is in fact and pigeon and not a blue jay or a hawk or any other feathered creature. Dolittle's coup, what presumably convinces the other animals of his acumen, is his ability to talk a suicidal tiger down from the top of a tall building.

There is a lot of dialogue about this healing of animals being John Dolittle's true calling. Animals can tell him what is wrong, making him better able to cure them. That they have all the same ills as human beings is an unimaginative waste of some potentially wondrous and humorous moments. **DOCTOR DOLITTLE** is best left for the small screen that sits in the living room. It is a film to provide some general levity, but it is not to be confused with something genuinely inspired.

●● Sonya Burres

This asteroid really makes a deep impact.

ARMAGEDDON

Touchstone Pictures presents a Jerry Bruckheimer Production of a Michael Bay Film, in association with Valhalla Motion Pictures. Directed by Michael Bay. Written by Jonathan Hensleigh and J.J. Abrams, from a story by Robert Roy Pool and Hensleigh; adaptation by Tony Gilroy and Shane Salerno. Produced by Jerry Bruckheimer, Gale Anne Hurd, Michael Bay; executive producers, Hensleigh, Jim Van Wyck, Chad Oman. Cinematography (Technicolor, Panavision): John Schwartzman. Music: Trevor Rabin. Editing: Mark Goldblatt, A.C.E. Production design: Michael White; supervising art director, Georg Hubbard; art directors, Lawrence A. Hubbs, Bruton Jones; set design, John P. Bruce, Daniel Jennings, Kevin Ishioka, George R. Lee, R. Gilbert Clayton, William Taliaferro, Mindi Toback, Patricia Klawon, Steven M. Saylor, Gary R. Speckman, Domenic Silvestri. Visual effects supervisors: Pat McClung, Richard Hoover; visual effects, Dream Quest Images. Costume design: Michael Kaplan, Magali Guidasci. Sound (DTS/DOLBY digital/SDDS): Keith A. Wester. Associate producers: Barry Waldman, Pat Sandston, Kenny Bates. Second unit director, stunt coordinator: Bates; second unit camera, Mauro Fiore. Casting, Bonnie Timmermann. 7/98, 150 mins. Rated PG-13

Harry S. Stamper.....	Bruce Willis
Dan Truman.....	Billy Bob Thornton
Grace Stamper.....	Liv Tyler
A.J. Frost.....	Ben Affleck
Charles (Chick) Chapple.....	Will Patton
Lev Andropov.....	Peter Stormare
General Kimsey.....	Keith David
Rockhound.....	Steve Buscemi
Oscar Choi.....	William Fichtner
Co-pilot Jennifer Watts.....	Jessica Steen
Karl.....	John Mahon
Dottie.....	Grace Zabriskie
Psychologist.....	Udo Kier
Hollis Vernon Stamper.....	Lawrence Tierney
Narrator.....	Charlton Heston

by Steve Biodrowski

You have to wonder about the critical reactions to a film like this. Why should a movie this effective be trashed almost universally? Perhaps GODZILLA had something to do with it: after the misguided mutant lizard, critics were probably sick at the very thought of big-budget summer blockbusters. But that's not enough to explain the reaction to this film.

A lot of the reason lies with the supercharged (and, at times, admittedly overdone) style of direc-



Paris is obliterated by a fragment of the killer asteroid, one of many effects highlights that surpasses DEEP IMPACT.

tor Michael Bay. Compared to most directors, he gets twice the camera coverage of any given scene, and editor Mark Goldblatt seems to have used most of the angles provided. The result is a rapid-fire visual rhythm that realizes the maximum impact from the various action scenes. It can also be a bit wearying. The dramatic point of the oil gusher scene that introduces the Bruce Willis character is rendered almost gratuitous: we're supposed to see how he handles himself under pressure; instead, all we feel is overwhelmed by a big set-piece that is irrelevant to the approaching asteroid. Likewise, the space station refueling scene goes awry for no

other reason than to insert some more explosions midway through the film. The scene is so confusing in its geography that any suspense is mitigated: audiences simply sit back and wait for the smoke to clear so they can count up the bodies.

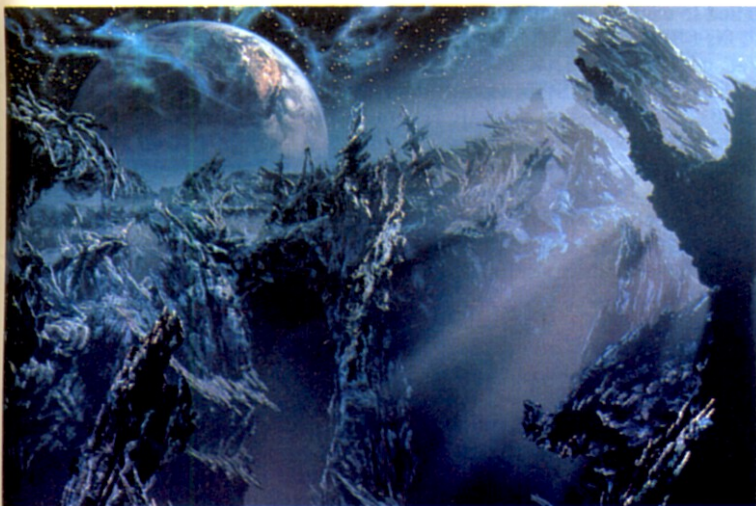
But these two missteps aside, the film works. Sure, the dramatic license assumed in matters of scientific accuracy is rather large—but ultimately irrelevant. The film hooks viewers in other ways, thanks not only to the high-powered effects but to some well-done characterizations and moving performances that immerse the audience in the filmic experience to the point where they don't question the leaps in credibility.

Despite proclamations that the film heralded the "Death of Storytelling," the plot is actually much more tightly structured than its obvious competitor. Unlike the soap opera-ish DEEP IMPACT, ARMAGEDDON remains focused on its main story, which is what to do about the asteroid; it avoids wandering off onto tangents in a vain attempt to work up human interest. The screenwriting team of ARMAGEDDON realize that there is just as much going on in the stories of the people trying to stop the disaster, as in a random cross-section of humanity. Instead of reducing these characters to a mere back story, the film pushes their emotional lives up front, mostly in the form of the love affair between Affleck

and Tyler (watch for the animal crackers scene!). Also, it was nice to have only one tearful farewell at the conclusion, rather than the half dozen in DEEP IMPACT. In this case, less was definitely more. By concentrating on the single act of self-sacrifice, the film makes it count. Perhaps if the scene had been rendered merely through dialogue it would have received more praise, but Bay uses some heart-rending montage effects—sort of a mutual, life-flashing-before-one's-eyes-flashback shared between a dying man and a loved one back home—that have a truly deep impact. It was a very ambitious, even experimental move for a mainstream film, and it works.

Critics like to write about storytelling because it is easily reducible to words. Cinematic qualities like *mise-en-scene* and photography are harder to convey and, hence, devalued. But Michael Bay (working on a typical Jerry Bruckheimer action-fest) uses just these elements to maximum effect—not to hide storytelling deficiencies (as some would have you believe) but to tell the story in the most effective way possible. The results work in ways that aren't necessary literary (which critics would prefer) and reach audiences in direct ways that don't necessarily require interpretation. In effect, the critic is rendered to some degree unnecessary, and this is what truly accounts for the reaction the film received. □

The apparently doomed Earth is glimpsed from the surface of the killer asteroid.



ART HOUSE

By Dan Persons

Every so often the heavens open up, and you find yourself looking at more independent genre films than you can shake a stick at (if that's your idea of a good time). We've got such conditions this month, which means we've no choice but to shift to Emergency Capsule Mode. To wit...

Lars Von Trier may have bitten off more than he could chew in trying to follow up his original, ultra-bizarre **THE KINGDOM** with **THE KINGDOM II** (October, 5/98, 286 mins, in two installments; not rated). Returning to the titular, benighted hospital mere



days after the end of the original film (which, like this installment, was actually four stitched-together hour-long episodes of a Dutch TV series), the director finds the institution in, if anything, an accelerated state of decay. The Minister of Health is after neurosurgery head Professor Moesgaard (Holger Juul Hansen), whose "Operation Morning Breeze" has led to sex in the sleep labs, organ transplants in the neuro operating rooms, and exorcisms in the basement. Judith (Birgitte Raaberg), having previously been impregnated by the malevolent poltergeist Aage Krüger (Udo Kier), has given birth to Little Brother (Kier again), a grotesque creature with the body of a deformed giant and the soul of a saint. Swedish putz Dr. Helmer (Ernst Hugo Järegård) has returned from Haiti with the zombie poison with which he hopes to enslave Krogshøj (Søren Pilmark) and win back the papers that incriminate him in the botched operation of young Mona (Laura Christensen). Meanwhile, life-affirming psychic Mrs. Drusse (Kirsten Rolffes) finds

MAGIC KINGDOM Part Two of Lars Von Trier's supernatural soap opera.



THE KINGDOM II, clockwise from left: Judith (Birgitte Raaberg) agonizes over the satanic forces bedeviling her child; arrogant Swedish surgeon Stig Helmer (Ernst-Hugo Jaregard) laments his exile in Denmark; Krogshøj (Søren Pilmark) loses his humanity thanks to a zombie poison from Tahiti.

that, despite her efforts at exorcism, the hospital is more overloaded with Satanic influences than ever. And, on a lighter note, the learning-disabled dishwashers-Greek chorus who have been commenting on all from a safe remove (Vita Jensen and Morten Rotne Leffers) seem well on their way to a date at the altar. Bridal registry at Madame Tussaud's, no doubt.

The big kick of the first **KINGDOM** was the way Von Trier upended the entire notion of a hospital: healthy men begged to be implanted with diseased organs; doctors spent precious little time in the fine art of healing; and the entire institution was ruled by a mystic society paradoxically pledged to science. Its great strength was to wrap all of this (and more) around a compelling, central core: the mystery of the death of young Mary, a restless spirit subjected in her mortal life to the torturous attentions of Dr. Krüger. There's no such focus in Part II, however; despite the fact that all Hell seems literally to be busting loose, the film feels more like a ragged collection of bizarre events, and less a wicked subversion of all the values society holds dear. The atmosphere isn't helped by Dr. Helmer's devolution into pure buffoonishness; humanistic Krogshøj's transformation, via that poison, into impenetrable misanthropy; or the demotion of the first episode's disturbing, spectral ambience into the all-too-tangible, staff-sponsored "ghost rides"

—chicken runs against oncoming traffic. Still, Von Trier has planted potent hooks in this loose hodgepodge of a film. By the time Helmer loses Mona to the very bowels of the building, Death himself hitches a ride to the hospital's front door, and Mrs. Drusse finds herself on an elevator apparently headed straight to Hades (trust me, I'm giving away nothing here), you'll be forgiven for hoping that it doesn't take another four years for the next (and possibly last) chapter to find its way to these shores. That's a good thing, isn't it?

Bill Plympton is getting closer. One of the most inventive cartoonists working today, he has not always been well-served by the feature format, where such efforts as **THE TUNE** and **J. LYLE** have failed to capture the unique flavor of his offbeat humor. Though not yet perfect, **I MARRIED A STRANGE PERSON** (Lion's Gate, 8/98, 75 mins, not rated) shows Mr. Plympton getting a stronger grasp on long-form storytelling in the saga of a man who, having been zapped by microwaves from a misdirected satellite antenna, finds himself able to bend reality to his will. Instead of becoming a Lathe of Heaven, however, this guy turns into a Check-Out at the Sharper Image, subverting the placid atmosphere of his suburban neighborhood, treating his wife to supernatural sex (one of Plympton's more wicked images has a pair of wall outlets, set in mo-

tion by all the good vibes, seeming to fuck doggy-style), wowing the viewers of a late-night talk show, and catching the attention of the evil Smile Corp. entertainment conglomerate. It's in the rather predictable machinations of the all-consuming corporation that Plympton stumbles most seriously, but **STRANGE PERSON** shows the director—a genuine auteur who draws every frame of his works—clearly moving in the right direction. Fer God's sake, Bill, don't stop now!



In **THE HANGING GARDEN** (Goldwyn, 5/98, 91 mins, R), a young, gay man (Chris Leavins) returns home to attend the wedding of his sister (Kerry Fox), startling the attendees with both his physical and emotional transformation (he was once an obese adolescent [Troy Veinotte] victimized by his abusive, alcoholic father [Peter MacNeill]) and setting in motion a string of events that will overturn the lives of all in his family. At points heavy-handed (the son's name is Sweet William, an herb; his sister is Rosemary; his mother, Iris; his father, Whiskey Mac) and at others quite affecting. The film's genre elements reside mostly in a symbolic image of the hanged teen that all of the characters can apparently see swinging from a backyard tree (the title's another pun, y'see), and in Iris' mysterious disappearance halfway through the film. It has the feel of a stage-play transferred to the screen, but boasts strong performances—especially that of Veinotte, who brings a bitter tang to the withdrawn teen William—and a bristly atmosphere rarely captured on film. Not the second-coming of SF in the cinema, but a compelling take on the dark side of family politics nonetheless. □

INSOMNIA

Director: Erik Skjoldbjærg. Writers: Nikolaj Frobenius & Skjoldbjærg. A Norsk Film, 6/98, 99 mins. Unrated. With: Stellan Skarsgård, Sverre Anker Ousdal, Bjørn Floberg, Giske Armand.

This excellent art house effort barely crosses over into genre territory, but it deserves mention, nonetheless. When local cops in a small Norwegian city above the Arctic Circle are unable to handle a murder investigation, homicide expert Jonas Engstrom (Skarsgård) travels north to take over. Unfortunately, some misinformation he's given ruins a stakeout, and in the ensuing chase, he shoots his partner in the fog. Unwilling to admit his error, he blames the shooting on the murderer and begins fabricating evidence to buttress his story. However, the murderer knows what he's up to and, in return for his silence, demands that Engstrom steer the investigation away from him; soon cop and killer are locked by necessity into a relationship that neither truly wants. All the while, Engstrom is losing sleep because of the unending daylight and his guilty conscience. On the verge of a breakdown, he begins to see glimpses of the victim. Is it merely hallucination? Perhaps, but then his dead partner comes back and completes a story he had only begun to tell while alive.

Director Skjoldbjærg shows a sure hand with this tricky material, keeping his camera's eye on his falling hero with an objective distance that never endorses his actions even while forcing us to identify with his predicament. Skarsgård (BREAKING THE WAVES) is fascinating in the lead role, playing a man who loses our sympathy but never our interest. Although his actions repulse us, his compulsion to avoid the embarrassment of tarnishing his spotless veneer is thoroughly engrossing. As he builds an ever more intricate and unwieldy structure of deception, one starts to experience chest pains from the tension of wondering how he will ever drag himself out from under its weight.

The answer is: he doesn't. The film provides no pat redemption; instead, for all practical purposes, he gets away with his crime (although good fortune also brings an end to the murderer). Still, the film leaves no doubt that the experience will plague him for the rest of his life. As Engstrom drives south, crossing back over the Arctic circle, the film comes down to a final haunting process shot: the image through the car's rear window fades from the ever-present daylight that has filled the rest of the movie, while Engstrom's unblinking gaze continues to stare forward. Skarsgård lets you see the doubt and pain behind the stoic facade, without any obvious emoting. Finally, the rest of the image fades, but an optical effect maintains the ovals of the tortured eyes against the black background as the credits roll. The brief art house run this film received was much less than it deserved. Look for it in the foreign-language section of your video store.

●●● Steve Biodrowski

REVIVALS

By Steve Biodrowski

The '70s seem to have been a prolific time for artsy cinefantastique. It was an era when it was acceptable, even desirable, to court profundity through a kind of hazy, often ill-defined mysticism that was evocative without necessarily being dramatic. If clear resolutions weren't provided, that was fine, because explaining a mystery diffuses its power; it was better to leave audiences searching for their own answers.

It's easy to poke fun at these ambitions today, for the films were seldom as inspired as they aspired to be. Nevertheless, good efforts emerged, including *DON'T LOOK NOW* (1974), *THE SHOUT* (1978), and two by Peter Weir: *THE LAST WAVE* (1979) and *PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK* (1975). The later recently emerged in a new director's cut (Kit Parker Films 6/98, 103 mins) that trimmed seven minutes from the running time.

The premise is simple: three school girls on a field trip to Hanging Rock go missing, along with one of their teachers; a fourth girl, who "witnessed" the event, can recall little, and a thorough search reveals nothing. The provincial, sexually-repressed attitudes of the locals leads them to suspect abduction and rape, but there is no evidence to support this. In fact, hints and portents suggest just the opposite: that some kind of ascension has taken place. Most tellingly, one of the missing girls, named Miranda (Anne Lambert), was likened to a Botticelli angel and had warned a friend that she

wouldn't be around much longer: was she planning to leave school—or the Earth itself? After a week, one of the other girls is found, but her condition only deepens the mystery: although she should be dead from exposure and starvation, she is merely scratched and dazed; nor can she offer any recollection of her disappearance.

Ultimately, the mystery is never solved, which is dramatically frustrating but thematically valid. Weir's film (scripted by Cliff Green from a novel by Joan Lindsay) is not about the solution of mysteries; it is about how the human mind copes with events that it cannot categorize according to known reality. The harsh tactics of the school's owner (Rachel Roberts) suggest a Freudian interpretation: the inexplicable disappearance is some kind of explosion of the repressed Id brought on by proximity to the phallic title structure. However, the film's strength is that it is not reducible to a single explanation, even a valid one; other explanations are equally valid. For instance, perhaps Miranda has achieved some kind of apotheosis—if not in a literal, then in a figurative sense—becoming a glorified ideal for those whom she left behind, a spiritual presence sensed in the woods or glimpsed in the form of a swan.

Apparently concerned that audiences would be reluctant to accept an unresolved ending, Weir begins his film with a title card suggesting that it is based on a real-life incident. After all, if the film is simply recording the truth,

The inexplicable disappearance of three school girls is the premise of the 1975 film, which has been re-released with seven minutes trimmed by the director.



PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK

Mysteries beyond human ken.



The angelic Miranda (Anne Lambert) ascends toward a communion with the ineffable atop Hanging Rock.

viewers might be more inclined to ponder what "really" did happen. Actually, this title card is just a dramatic device—and an effective one—to hook viewers into contemplating the film's mystery.

Seen today, *HANGING ROCK*, like many films from its era, is not a profound experience, but it is a fascinating one. With beautiful cinematography (by Russell Boyd) and an effective (if slightly dated) score, the film is often mesmerizing. The missing minutes are negligible: the story was never as strong as the mood; the condensed running time sustains the mood slightly better.

After the careful buildup to the disappearance and the initial excitement that follows, the story still levels out onto a plateau, like a *TWILIGHT ZONE* episode stretched to feature length, but it never loses the sense of wonder inherent in its inexplicable occurrence. In one significant scene, a character relates a dream that makes no sense to him but does to us, because we know things he doesn't; perhaps the mystery of the film is likewise a matter of limited perspective. Ultimately, the film doesn't "break on through" the doors of perception, but it does remind us that there is something on the other side. □

THE WATCHER

By Frederick C. Szebin

SC-FI TV—BOOM OR BUST? With Emmy upon us, it's time to lay last season to rest.

The dust is long settled on last September's Sci-Fi races. Not much is left standing, and rightfully so. *THE VISITOR*, *TIME COP*, and *SLEEPWALKERS* left not much more than a stain on the network schedule and a vague memory—if even that—in the minds of viewers. What survived may not have met our expectations, but after the Sci-Fi Boom, what didn't go bust makes the vast wasteland just a little less lonely for those of us seeking an oasis of entertainment.

BABYLON 5 remains the best overall SF series on the air as its five-year story arc came to a close. Throughout its run—as can be witnessed on its five-day-a-week schedule on TNT—J. Michael Straczynski's epic features fine performances from its ensemble cast. They never look down upon the genre trappings of ray guns and rubber faces, but instead seem to relish the layered characters they have been given. It's tough enough in any genre to find characters imbued with such passion and so many psychological levels; the terms 'good guys' and 'bad guys' become pitifully inadequate to describe the inhabitants of man's last best hope for peace. Always excellent CGI, visually-exciting production design and personality-enhancing makeups—not mere nose or brow ridges, but sometimes body-encompassing prosthetics—make *B-5* one of the single best SF series the medium has ever offered.

BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER has moved into the mainstream of appreciation after a rousing first season as a cult favorite. Excellent, nuanced performances, clever, witty scripts, and an ever-changing series mythology still makes it the WB's best live-action program. True, plot holes can show, but they seem small when compared to the program's overall quality and fun quotient.

One of the former best, *THE X-FILES*, became almost a sad viewing experience during its limp 1997-98 season. Perhaps it was the strain of going from Season Four into a feature film and then straight into production of Season Five that weighed heavily upon the quality. That can be understood. There was certainly little to appreciate. Even Stephen King's much-ballyhooed addition to Mulder's files (a killer doll story, for goodness' sake!) didn't focus much on the horror aspects as much as it zeroed in on the fifth season's overall lack of quality writing. Among the worst episodes was a mildly creepy tale about an attacking root system that lost all steam halfway through to become just another plot-by-the-numbers spook show.

If the worst of *THE X-FILES* remains of a higher quality than the rest of television, that's



After a season overloaded with new genre programming that bit the dust, five-year veteran *BABYLON 5* remains the best science-fiction on television.

not saying much. As Scully lay dying from cancer, her brother accosts Mulder in the hospital corridor. It was a fine dramatic point, but the moment, and perhaps the entire series' momentum, is lost when we—as Scully's brother does—begin to see Mulder's hunt for Truth At All Costs as pitifully self-indulgent. It was a scene that stood for the entire fifth season: a once truly great show was blunted, demeaned and vilified to resemble everything it had left in its dust in previous seasons. And the whole conspiracy-unanswered questions motif is, after all, getting a bit tired.

Genre sitcoms—and there have been far more of those than standard genre programs—have run the risk of being the worst television has to offer. If they fail creatively, it is on two fronts, as SF and as comedy. The result can be horrendously bad (i.e., *IT'S ABOUT TIME* and *MEEGO*). But sometimes the formula works. *THIRD ROCK FROM THE SUN* rose above its initial bad notices to become an award-winning media darling. Its farcical nature is played to the hilt by a very capable cast led by Emmy-winner John Lithgow, former SNL member Jane Curtain, and an appealing cast. They don't just support the leads, but offer their own comedic strengths to create a living comic strip of goofy gags and silly portrayals that stop just shy of being silly in a bad way. That's the key to *THIRD ROCK*: it realizes the ridiculousness of its world and lunges at the viewer at every opportunity. It doesn't just tickle the funny bone—it gnaws on it as quickly as possible.

Another belly-laugh program is the borderland sitcom *WORKING*, with a grown-up Fred Savage just trying to get by in a corporate wasteland. The characters here are too bitter to be yuppies. They've seen the writing on the wall, and its written in their own sweat. What

makes *WORKING* borderline genre is its often hilarious jaunts into characters' imaginations to get a glimpse of what they really think about each other, themselves, and the soulless business they work in. From the opening credits, featuring scurrying ants and the drone-like workers of *METROPOLIS*, to the faux-commercials for the imaginary sponsor Upton/Weber, *WORKING* creates that longed-for, rare TV viewing experience: a genuine laugh.

The absolutely most hilarious television is still to be found in animation. *THE SIMPSONS* has more laughs per episode than most of *TGIF*'s entire lineup can generate in a year. Ditto for *KING OF THE HILL* and the renegade cut-outs of *SOUTH PARK*. Nothing is sacred on these shows. Good thing; the true meaning of life, or at least a clear view of its absurdities,

can be seen just under the fart jokes and in the smears of all-singing, all-dancing poop. If any of these shows were done in live action, not only would half of the gags and plots be jettisoned for power book outlines, but they might actually be given the consideration of Emmy Award ownership that they truly deserve. Each ranks among the best comedy ever written anywhere, though only the fans seem to know it.

As for the Emmy, legend and fact have it that genre performances are usually relegated to the back burner. Note to any Emmy voters reading this (come on, you know you do!) consider Andreas Katsulas, G'Kar on *BABYLON 5*. For five seasons, this fine character actor has had his face hidden behind some of the best prosthetics the Optic Nerve boys have come up with. But that hasn't blunted Mr. Katsulas' talent, nor his impassioned performance. He has deftly played the Narn home-world representative who metamorphosed from snarling potential baddie in the first season, into a religious-minded carrier of the Word, then into the renowned scribe of the Alliance's Code. Throughout it all, Katsulas has made G'Kar a memorable and beloved character caught in the whirlwind of home world social breeding and inter-planetary politics. There are few characters in any genre with such a range, and certainly there are few actors in any medium capable of carrying it all with the grace and aplomb of Katsulas. Work in the genre should be given an extra credit in award consideration, I think. To take a being of total fiction—a lizardy soldier with spots, who flies in space ships, shoots zap guns and sees the grandeur of the heavens in a blue screen—and turn him into a living, breathing, feeling creature that any race can identify with, is truly a sign of an actor who knows his craft. □

GARGANTUA

Director: Bradford May. Writer: Ronald Parker. Fox TV, 5/98. 120 mins, w/commercials. With: Adam Baldwin, Julie Carmen, Emile Hirsch, Peter Adams.

Great horny toads. When Marine biologist Jack Ellway (Baldwin) and son Brandon (Hirsch) come to an island paradise to study the effects of earthquakes on sea life, they discover a race of mutated frogs ranging from three- to forty-foot tall thanks to pesticide dumping years before. Brandon befriends the youngest and cutest of the pack in a subplot that's supposed to suggest E.T. but only annoys. Dad, meanwhile, has to deal with nasty fishermen, hyper locals, and every blunted cliché this genre has to offer. *JAWS* and *GORG0* are also ripped off in this a wasted \$7.5 million attempt to cash in on *GODZILLA* (it aired on the film's opening night).

Director May (responsible for last year's abysmal *ASTEROID*) has done better than this, and the actors—the wonderful Baldwin and Carmen among them—suffer through the most overworked paint-by-the-numbers material known to every monster movie fan older than five. The CGI, except for some long shots of Brandon's baby sea serpent running on all fours, is laughably bad, as are the designs of the creatures themselves: smooth, rounded faces for the females and jutting horns for the boys—creature conceptions that Harryhausen wouldn't have used for his lowest budgeted features. This film doesn't even offer campy entertainment.

● Frederick C. Szebin

NICK FURY

Director: Rod Hardy. Screenplay: David Goyer, based on the Marvel Comics character. Fox TV, 5/98. 120 mins, w/commercials. With: David Hasselhoff, Lisa Rinna, Sandra Hess, Tracy Waterhouse.

To comic book fans, one name synonymous with action, adventure and intrigue is Nick Fury, that one-eyed, war-weary veteran of WW II and savior of the free world more times than even he would care to remember. Fox's tele-flick, though it has a few moments, won't lead anyone to think of anything except how some of Marvel's best comics get turned into some of the lamest movies.

Hardy directs briskly from a script by Goyer that, due to budgetary restrictions, certainly couldn't recreate Fury's high-tech world, but it surely could have added more daring-do and imagination. Another problem is the script's lack of originality. Certainly a previously published tale from Marvel's mighty bullpen would have fared better than some of the stuff here, including a ridiculous, pompous bureaucrat riding everyone's nerves with his total lack of experience—one of the hoariest clichés of any genre. Hasselhoff cuts a fine figure as Fury, but Hess fares less well with her uneven German accent and unimpressive maniacal laugh. A neat ending with a hint of further troubles leaves some hope that maybe they can blow the dust off in future films—the cast is certainly good enough to deserve it ●● Frederick C. Szebin

BORDERLAND

By Anthony P. Montesano

Fate or free will? Destiny or choice? These are the age-old questions about life that are once again raised—albeit in a beguilingly fresh manner—in writer-director Peter Howitt's *SLIDING DOORS* (5/98, Miramax/Paramount, 108 mins, PG-13). What is ostensibly a “what if” fantasy starring the red-hot Gwyneth Paltrow in a dual role, actually turns into a thought-provoking drama about making choices in one's life regardless of the circumstances, good or bad. Likely to be one of the best genre efforts of 1998, the film was mistakenly marketed (as most borderland efforts are) as a romantic comedy (presumably for fear that audiences might not otherwise be able to categorize it), which sorely undercuts what it truly has to offer.

Howitt tackles a theme which has forever been at the core of most world religions: Is life made up of the choices we make or controlled by a destiny that we simply play out? The juggling of these two concepts has filled volumes of theology books for centuries. Wisely, Howitt's film offers no easy answer but does hint at a compromise. Even if we are placed in a situation by destiny, *SLIDING DOORS* argues, the choices we make still matter.

Helen, a young PR executive in London, is fired from her job. On the way home—where her boyfriend, Gerry (John Lynch) is having an affair with his former girlfriend Lydia (Jeanne Tripplehorn)—she both misses and catches a train as it is pulling out of the station (the sliding doors of the title). This sets the stage for the film to literally split into two parallel stories. Missing the train initially seems to be a bad thing: Helen is mugged; she goes to the hospital; gets home too late to catch her boyfriend screwing around; ends up as a waitress; and seemingly misses the opportunity to meet the sweet and handsome James (John Hannah). Catching the train initially has the opposite result: Helen first has a serendipitous meeting with James on the train; she then catches her boyfriend cheating on her, kicks him out, starts a new life as an independent PR consultant, cuts her hair and dyes it blonde, and begins to date James.

TWO HELENS!

Alternate reality: fate or free will?



In *SLIDING DOORS*' alternate-parallel reality story, Helen (Gwyneth Paltrow) moves out on her cheating boyfriend and falls in love with James (John Hannah).

But Howitt does not take the expected path, and before the stories are over, the viewer begins to realize that life is filled with situations which, at first, may seem awful but ultimately turn out great and vice versa. Life, Howitt would argue, is what you make of it.

Director Frank Capra and actor James Stewart brilliantly explored the theme of life choices over 50 years ago in *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE*. In that film, the emphasis is squarely on how one's life affects so many around it, thus fulfilling itself in the process. Through divine intervention, the suicidal George Bailey in *ITS A WONDERFUL LIFE* is given the opportunity to look at the “big picture” and realize this. George can compare and contrast life in his hometown with and without him. Suddenly, what seemed to be a life of failure and missed opportunities actually turns out to be “a wonderful life.”

Howitt has modified Capra's approach for the '90s. Unlike George (but like the rest of us), Helen in *SLIDING DOORS* is not given that window on the future. No angels show up to guide her

through her journey. She must navigate herself through her parallel lives, even though she cannot see the forest for the trees. Paltrow's solid performance as the two Helens centers the film with a human dignity, frailty, and strength most actresses only hint at on screen. As with George Bailey, we care what happens to Helen.

Howitt's script ties the two strains of the film together with moments common to both story lines. Despite what might appear on paper a difficult convention to follow, clever writing and fluid cinematography, by Remi Adefarasin, keep things smoothly on track.

In the end, catching the train or missing the train is not what matters. Life is filled with trains caught and missed. Ultimately what makes a life “wonderful” is how we choose to look at it as we live it. Helen ultimately has to discover—as her life is unredeemed, scene by scene—how to make the most of each moment. In *SLIDING DOORS*, the past is gone and the future hasn't arrived yet. The only time that really matters is in the present. □

CHARLES CIOFFI

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to season five. "The last three shows I did, everybody was so relaxed. The first three episodes, everybody was very touchy, and they were obviously flying by the seat of their pants," he said. "First of all, they were shooting an American show in Vancouver, and things were being operated by remote control from Los Angeles. Chris was there, but I don't know what kind of a track record he had, and I think the people were a little nervous and edgy."

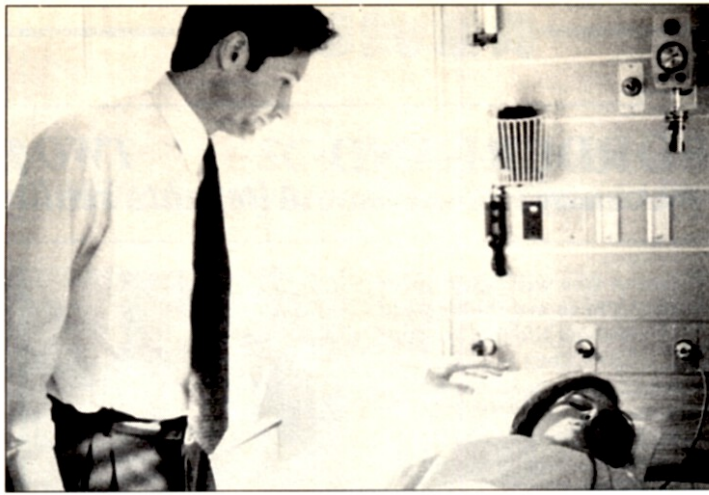
"Four years later, everybody is so sweet—they can't do enough for you, you know? The largess has really gotten to be considerable. And consequently, it was a lot easier a set to work on. Everybody knew exactly what their position was and what they wanted, and all the wheels that needed to be greased were done very discreetly, and nobody raised their voice or got out of line or had a temper tantrum." Considering that television success often brings with it inflated egos and exaggerated senses of self-importance, it's refreshing to hear that THE X-FILES has become more relaxed over the years. "They were a little uptight in the pilot," he reiterated, "and it was just in a matter of attitude and self assurance, but the people were infinitely better the second time than the first."

Is Blevins really gone for good? "You know, they never actually say that," he pointed out. "We see him get shot and fall on the ground, but we don't necessarily know that he is dead—we don't know what has happened to his body. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if Blevins came back. You know," he added, conspiratorially, "I was talking to one of the producers, Kim Manners, who also directed the episode, and I said, 'So I guess that's it for me,' and he just looked at me with a very Mona Lisa smile and said, 'You know, in The X FILES nothing is as it appears. Don't be surprised if you come back, just because it looks like you've died.'" □

VERONICA CARTWRIGHT

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psychological," she says, "where they sort of leave you in that ambiguous state: you're not sure if it's the government or it's an actual alien abduction, you know? Because there's a possibility that it could possibly be true. Who knows?" So, is she a 'believer' like her character, Cassandra Spender? "Well, I mean, are we the only people? There seems to be so much energy floating around for us



Scully's illness from cancer was a recurring motif last season—a part of the THE X-FILES' descent into soap-opera style manipulation and melodrama.

to be the only people in the universe. I was sort of hoping that when that little Sojourner went up onto Mars that some Martian guy would come out and check it out, but, you know, that never happened."

But what if extraterrestrials were to visit for real? Would she welcome them as warmly as Cassandra Spender? "Oh, who knows," she responded. "I mean, if they all look like Jeff Bridges in STARMAN...absolutely!" □

LONE GUNMAN

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decided a while ago he was not a university professor, that he works part time for a company like Xerox, and fixes photocopy machines when they're busted. I've never done that myself, but I've always been struck by the fact they come dressed in suits, when you'd expect a guy in overalls."

Byers and he are a close fit, Harwood notes: "He's basically me, except he doesn't laugh much. And he's much more paranoid. I had to use a lot of my sort of innocent reactions when we did that big episode. Usually the characters are just there to provide information in an entertaining way, so we typically just have to be involved in the excitement of passing along the information. Which makes us technology geeks, I guess. For "Unusual Suspects" I had to find a lot more stuff for him. It helped he was eight years younger, and a lot more innocent. What I hoped to show when I was doing the part was that he was a naive guy, and became the Byers we now know by the end of the episode: more cynical, doesn't laugh much, very paranoid, and very proud of his information-gathering techniques."

Personally, Harwood doesn't get involved in pursuing conspiracy theories, and says, "The world

is too complicated to be worrying about that kind of thing for me. I'm just getting by. I think Chris Carter uses that atmosphere just to play his stories in; I don't think it's necessarily a mission he has to educate us about conspiracies." As for speculations about how long the series will continue, he said, "I enjoy watching it, and I'd like it to continue, but it's better that it ends before people get tired of it, than it continues on and on. And, again as a viewer, it would be really nice if Chris Carter could decide ahead of time when it was going to end, then write to a close, rather than just having the series end in midair because no one's watching it anymore." □

X-FILES

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utes, until she is rescued by Mulder. It's sad that THE X-FILES' first feature film should muffle its only significant female character and center its climax around such a conventional scenario. The sequence deserves Mulder as well, for it is only with those traditional "masculine" qualities of physical courage and brute strength (as well as the Well-Manicured Man's information and that lucky fall through the hole) that he rescues Scully.

The casting is impressive but many of the guest actors are wasted, especially Blythe Danner, who deserves something better. Glenna Headly, a fine comic actress, barely registers. William B. Davis comes across as just another faceless opponent, notable only for his omnipresent cigarette. The Lone Gunman (Dean Haglund, Bruce Harwood, Tom Braidwood) are amusing in their brief time on screen, but serve very little purpose. Mitch Pileggi's Skinner is also given short shrift. Only Landau stands out, playing the paranoid Kurtzweil with relish, even if his

constant reappearances in alleyways eventually become unintentionally comic.

The special effects, especially the spaceship that rises up from beneath the Antarctic ice, are impressive. Mark Snow's score, sounds like generic action film music. The show's long-running motif of buried secrets—sometimes literally buried—receives an effective workout through the script and on the screen. And if you wanted answers as to What It's All About, we are given some, but much of the story remains in the dark (what role do the series' clones and shapeshifters play in all this?). But as it turns out, the aliens and the Syndicate are minor players here. The desires and fears that live in the hearts of Mulder and Scully are at this movie's center, and no one could express those thoughts and feelings better than Duchovny and Anderson, the masters of hard-boiled cynicism, sly deadpan humor and yearning tenderness all wrapped up together. It's time these two actors moved to the big screen permanently, and not just as Mulder and Scully. □

GODZILLA

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PARK dino designs, refined Delgado's Godzilla into the version that was to appear in the film. Reportedly, Toho pressured DeBont to make his monster more closely resemble its Japanese progenitor. Insiders who have seen maquettes and drawings of the Stan Winston Godzilla describe it as a "homogenized" Godzilla incorporating features from the best Japanese designs with more lifelike dinosaur traits. The monster was dark brownish-gray in color, with spots and highlights all over its body and a patch of green skin on the belly; it had nictating eyelids and realistic eyes, teeth and claws. Its skin was scaly, but smoother and more dinosaur-like than the Toho versions, and its legs and feet were slender and supported the more crouched posture of a dinosaur. "It was similar to the Japanese Godzilla," said a special-effects man who worked on the aborted project. "It was still vaguely humanoid, but it was obvious it couldn't be a man in a suit because the proportions were different." Stan Winston Studio also designed Godzilla's opponent, The Gryphon, but sadly, this monster also was never publicly revealed. □

Excerpted from *Japan's Favorite Mons-star: the Unauthorized Biography of Godzilla*, published by ECW Press.

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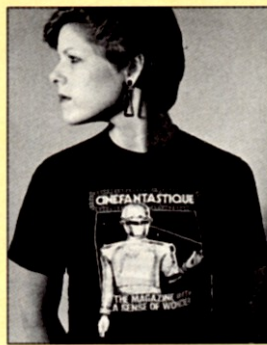
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MILLENNIUM

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Jordan. The cabin, for Morgan, had become Frank's yellow house, where the Black are reunited, even if death soon takes Catherine away. "I didn't feel right leaving Frank without his yellow house. I think in life sometimes you search for a yellow house, but for Frank, it actually was that cabin."

Morgan and Wong wrote the season finale not knowing whether *MILLENNIUM* would be re-

In "The Curse of Frank Black," Frank (Lance Henriksen) takes his daughter (Brittany Tiplady) out for Halloween.



newed. They pitched several endings to Carter, who made a surprising suggestion that they kill Catherine. Morgan and Wong were taken aback, but didn't object, especially when Carter said to leave her death ambiguous. After thinking about how to make Catherine's death meaningful, Morgan discussed it with Megan Gallagher and described the scenario to her. "I told her the neat part will be that after Frank Black has done so much sacrificing for his family, ultimately it will be Catherine who makes the ultimate sacrifice. She liked that. So that had a big part in the decision to kill Catherine."

Like so many plot ideas, the plague as millennial doom emerged from the writers' research. "When I looked at the current research, I found that the thing that was most likely to get us was some sort of plague or virus," Morgan said. "I didn't really pay much attention during the mad cow scare in England, but in reading about it I found it horrifying."

One of the most striking sequences of the two-parter is the third act depicting Lara's visions of the apocalypse and her breakdown. It was shot and cut much

like a music video, accompanied by the Patti Smith song about heroin, "Horses," which had been a college favorite of Morgan's. He had always envisioned someone going crazy to it. "Editing was really difficult. Doing this was rather naive on my part," Morgan admitted. "Music videos probably have a budget close to what one of our entire episodes costs, and we had only three days to put it together. I don't think we competed very well with the kind of imagery you see on MTV. But I felt that this hasn't been done on a primetime, network drama. I'm glad we did it, but it was really, really hard."

With renewal confirmed last May by Fox, the responsibilities of running *MILLENNIUM*'s third season have been given to Chip Joannessen and newcomer Michael Duggan (*EARTH 2*). Michael Perry, Erin Maher and Kay Reindl have remained on staff. Chris Carter also plans to be more involved than he was second season. Morgan and Wong have departed, satisfied with their work on the show. "I'm really proud of a lot of the episodes this season," Wong said. "The frustrating thing was that we didn't find a new audience. Some of the people who watched it

the first season decided it wasn't for them and didn't come to watch it this season to see if they liked it better or see how it changed." □

DRACULA IN INSTANBUL

continued from page 93

description may sound more gruesome than it is—the puncturing and cutting and stuffing all happen discreetly outside of camera view.

DRAKULA INSTANBUL'DA, by the way, like Murnau's *NOSFERATU*, is an unauthorized adaptation of Stoker's novel, which was still in copyright outside the United States in the early '50s. (*Dracula*'s American copyright had been invalid from the very beginning—the result, apparently, of Stoker's bungled filing of copyright papers based on an American newspaper serialization, rather than book.) This may have something to do with the absence of any credit to Stoker; instead, the screenplay, by Turgut Demirag, Umit Deniz, and director Muhtar, is officially based on a novel by Ali Riza Seyfioglu, *Kazikli Voyvoda* (i.e., *The Impaling Voivode*). The film was produced during a post-war period of democratic expansion and westernization

RESURRECTIONS: "Nosferatu"

By Steve Biodrowski

Like the vampire of its title, NOSFERATU is a shriveled, barely animated corpse that somehow refuses to die. It continually rises from the crypt, in various forms—video, laser, film—with restored footage, image, or film speed. The most complete version I have ever seen (84 mins., not counting a 15-minute intermission) screened at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Theatre in Beverly Hills as part of a series of German silent films accompanied by the 70-piece German Film Orchestra of Babelsberg.

The screening featured a print from Germany, with subtitles in its native language (an extra screen, off to the side, provided English translation). The orchestra's conductor, Berndt Heller, was responsible for reconstructing Hans Erdmann's original music, which was contracted by director F. W. Murnau for the film's world premiere in 1922. Erdmann's written score was destroyed by fire in 1942. The reconstruction was based on Erdmann's romantic suite, with additional music (including Chopin) suggested by a film music manual on which Erdmann collaborated in 1927.

I have never been a fan of this inexplicably well-regarded film, which has the pace of frozen molasses. (Can anyone write a plot summary that could in any way account for the running time?) In fact, I recall the hoopla about the film's laserdisc release, which restored the image so that details of the set design, once indistinct, were now rendered with crystal clarity. "Good," I thought, "now we can actually watch the paint dry."

The Babelsberg performance did little to change my mind; however, the score itself was effective at setting the intended tone of the film. (The orchestra, by the way, included a synthesizer, which was most probably not a part of Erdmann's original instrumentation.) The music unified the film, helping to bridge the transitions and fill in the longueurs. For one brief moment, I even felt an unexpected creepy sense of dread, just before the intermission: after Count Orlock has killed the crew of the ship taking him toward Bremen, the film cuts to a spooky silhouetted long shot of the bow cutting through the waves, followed by the blackly comic subtitle: *This ship of death had a new captain.*

More recently, NOSFERATU resurfaced on videotape (Arrow Entertainment, 75 mins, 1998), with a song score by rock group Type-O Negative. The tape only serves to remind one of the effectiveness of the orchestral score: although the songs aren't bad, they work against the film's narrative, except during transitional moments when the vocals give way to some atmospheric instrumental work. And there's a somewhat pointless introduction given by David Carradine, during which he insists on mis-pronouncing the word "genre"—somewhere in between "John" and "Sean." □



NOSFERATU leads the trend of adding sound to silents, with two live restorations of its original score and two video releases with new music.

in Turkey, during which many Hollywood genres were imitated.

With any luck, a subtitled, projectable print of DRACULA IN ISTANBUL will wend its way west and allow for a more comprehensive evaluation. Meanwhile, now that both the Hungarian and Turkish DRACULAs have revealed their secrets, there is one more reputedly excellent, and thought-to-be-lost international vampire film worth tracking down: EL VAMPIRO AECHECA (i.e., The Lurking Vampire), an Argentine film circa 1960 starring the famed Mexican vampire German Robles in a Bradbury-esque tale of a vampire child-molester who haunts a creepy carousel.

After that, there's only LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT. □

Special thanks to Bill Littman and Scott MacQueen for their assistance with this article.

SOUNDS OF SILENTS

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the scientist's deranged hopes. But unlike some of the disappointing compositions of that series, Lucas does not depend on any one genre to convey the Golem's human aspirations.

Wegener's poignant portrayal of the Golem is underscored by Lucas and Horn's alternately sinister and humorous composition—which, Lucas says, is meant to reveal the monster's human yearnings. The ominous chords of horror films are undercut by a twangy, hallucinatory country strain. The two worked separately and then meshed their compositions together, creating themes for the various characters. The Golem's musical theme marvelously expresses the monster's desire to run free of his duties to Rabbi Löw and the repulsion he evokes in Miriam. Listening to the Lucas-Horn piece is to feel the weight of the heavy clay costume Wegener sports as the

Golem and the monster's dream of shedding it.

Regarding the score, Lucas sees himself as a "reanimator" and says that his work is completely in the spirit of house pianists who improvised tunes, while incorporating popular songs into their accompaniment. Lucas objects to Anderson's work because, he argues, "You can't travel in a time machine." He believes her efforts to show films as they were originally screened are futile. The certainty that we cannot experience the film as it was initially intended gives an artist license to create at will, he claims.

Yet Anderson hardly seems unrealistic in her approach to presenting films. She is the first to recognize the limitations of her work: "History informs my performances, but I can't possibly delude myself into thinking this is a historical recreation—more like hysterical recreations! We listen with ears that are just too different now." Her concern, rather, is to respect the conditions which directors of the silent era had expected for the screening of their films.

When Giorgio Moroder released METROPOLIS with a rock score in 1984, Anderson was pleased that younger audiences went because it may have led to an interest in films of the that era, but she saw two problems with Moroder's presentation. First, she objected to the elimination of intertitles. Second, she felt the music was not sufficiently frightening. She recalled that during the catacombs scene the audience was laughing. Both objections tie in with Anderson's greatest concern about new scores: music and image must work together to move the intended narrative forward. When music overpowers visuals, musicians "violate the original work of art. The music causes the audience to read the films in a perverse way... The two

[music and images] are not supposed to war with each other...." She is particularly troubled by films being used to draw an audience for what is primarily a concert. Frequently, films will be shown on video monitors or at inappropriate speeds, or musicians may improvise their work to loosely fit the plot. Anderson, for whom timing is essential, finds such an approach sloppy, saying it "trivializes the image."

The original score, while giving a wholeness to the film that can't be achieved with a set of themes, also offers insight into the way directors interpreted their own work. In Murnau's NOSFERATU, for example, the tendency to increase film speed to signal supernatural events can appear comic if not for the original score which tells us the intended tone of these scenes. In short, the original scores can restore a film's dignity.

Silent films are already removed from our experience in several important ways: the stylized acting; the visual distortedness of the expressionist period; finally, the simple fact that we are viewing films over a half century old. Naturally, how we define what is fearful, beautiful, or dramatic has changed drastically. While we may appreciate the artistry of a silent film, it is still a foreign world. The appeal of contemporary scores is their immediacy: Lucas, Marriott, and others manage to animate a film in a way that is understandable to a contemporary audience. Whether the audience is familiar with Lucas's music or not, its idiom is a familiar one that provides an entree to the world of characters on the screen.

Mark Dresser points out that writing contemporary music for silent films provides a special opportunity for musicians, one that generally cannot be duplicated by composers working in the film industry today. He is intrigued by what he sees as a new form: composers and improvisers such as he getting to work with films "made in a place of high creativity and vitality before it [film] was so corporate." □

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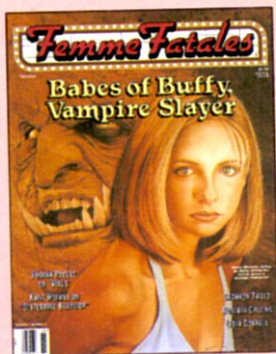
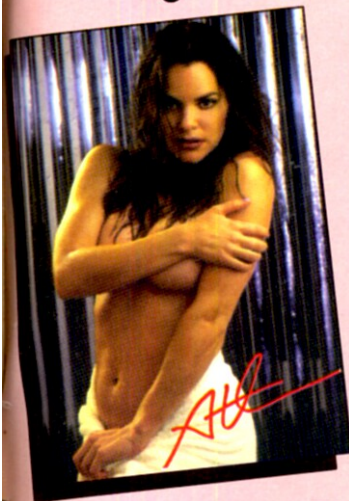
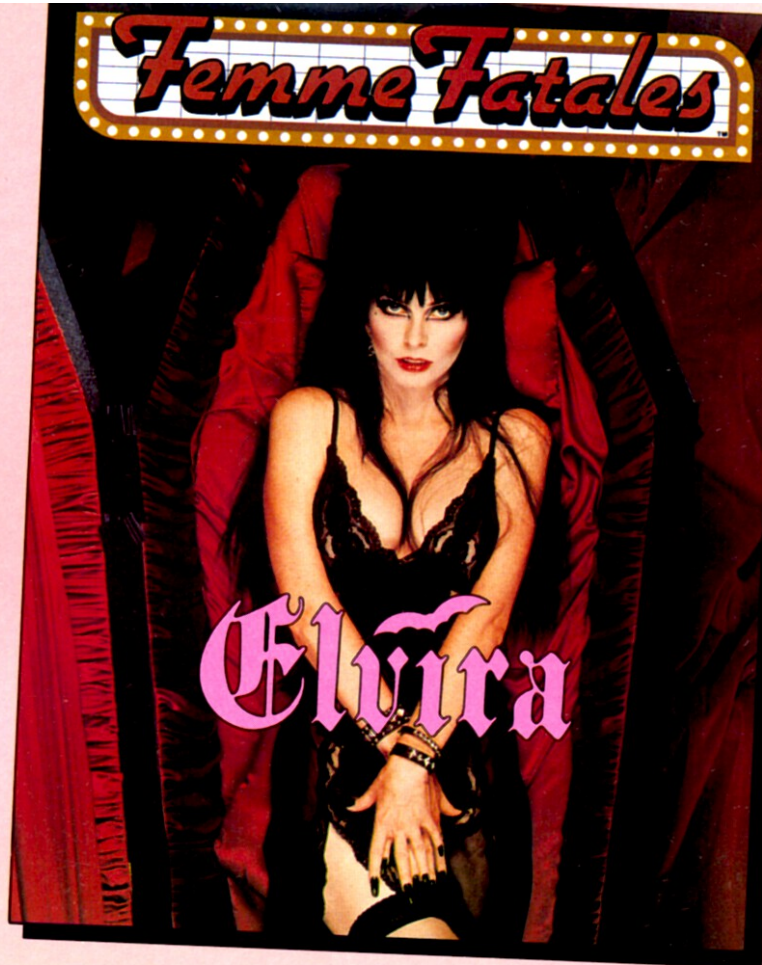
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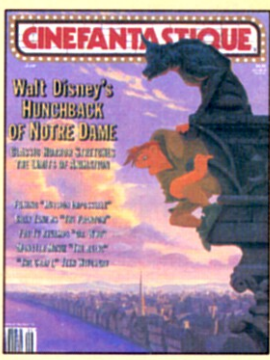
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